

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Balancing Life in Christ. Session 7, 1 John – Full Scale Faith. Section 4 [3:9-4:6] Central Warning; Section 5 [4:7-14] Foundational Imperative

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide Questions, 4) FAQs

Abstract:

These notes from a lecture by Dr. Robert Yarbrough analyze portions of the New Testament book of **1 John**, focusing on passages that issue a **central warning** and present a **foundational imperative**. Dr. Yarbrough explains that the author, John, alternates between emphasizing **faith**, **obedience to commandments**, and **love**, stressing that a balanced Christian life incorporates all three. The text discusses the warning against the error of Cain, emphasizing the importance of **righteousness and love for fellow believers** as signs of being children of God, especially in the context of a church schism. It also underscores the **foundational imperative of God's love**, highlighting that true love is rooted in divine action in Christ, particularly the atonement, and is manifested in believers loving one another. Finally, the lecture touches upon the need to **test spirits** and discern truth from error based on confessions about Jesus Christ and adherence to the **apostolic message**.

Briefing Document:

Here is a detailed briefing document reviewing the main themes and most important ideas or facts from the provided excerpts of Dr. Robert Yarbrough's teaching on the Johannine Epistles (Session 7 of "Balancing Life in Christ," covering 1 John 3:9-4:14):

Overall Context:

Dr. Yarbrough's teaching focuses on "balancing life in Christ," which in the Johannine epistles involves the interplay of faith (doctrine), works (keeping commandments), and love (loving God and neighbor). John frequently alternates his emphasis between these three elements, but they are always interconnected. Session 7 delves into a "Central Warning" (3:9-4:6) and a "Foundational Imperative" (4:7-14).

Section 4: Central Warning (3:9-4:6) - Beware of Cain's Error and False Prophets

This section serves as a warning to the readers, not merely to condemn, but to provide a contrasting scenario to what godly life looks like, ultimately leading to a "summons to love."

- **The Nature of Being Born of God:**
- A key theme reiterated is that "no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him." (Source 1, 2)
- "God's seed" can refer to the Word of God abiding in a person, or God's offspring abiding in God. (Source 2)

- The practice of righteousness and love for fellow believers are presented as clear markers of being a "child of God," in contrast to being a "child of the devil." (Source 2) "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." (Source 2)
- **The Message from the Beginning:**
- John explicitly states that the "message that you've heard from the beginning" is "that we should love one another." (Source 2)
- **Cain as a Negative Example:**
- Cain, who was "of the evil one and murdered his brother," serves as a stark example of the opposite of love and righteousness. His deeds were evil, while his brother's were righteous. (Source 2)
- The warning against Cain's error is connected to the reality that the world hates believers, just as Cain hated his righteous brother. (Source 2)
- **Love as an Active Principle:**
- John emphasizes that love is not merely an abstract concept or a noun; it is an "activity," an "action," and the "direct result of a relationship." (Source 3)
- Love involves an "awareness of other people and their needs," which is a "primary marker of being a child of God." (Source 3)
- This active love also serves as an "assurance that you possess eternal life." (Source 3) Feeling "troubled by other people's needs" is presented as a positive sign of God's work in one's life. (Source 4)
- The call is to "not love in word, or talk, but in deed and truth." (Source 2)
- **Confirmation and Assurance Amidst Schism:**
- John writes in the context of a recent schism in the church ("they went out from us," 2:19). This event caused "anguish, a lot of uncertainty sometimes, a lot of instability" for the remaining believers. (Source 3, 4)
- The practices of those who left (not abiding, not practicing righteousness, not loving their brother, cutting themselves off from the apostolic fellowship) serve as a way to identify them. (Source 3)
- Assurance is found not in self-confidence, but in "God's character." (Source 4) "Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." (Source 4)
- God's greatness transcends the instability caused by calamity, grief, or external events like the schism. Assurance is rooted in trusting in God's command and goodness. (Source 4, 5)
- **Hallmarks of Gospel Reception:**
- Faith, obedience (keeping commandments), and love are presented as the intertwined hallmarks of receiving the gospel. All three are mentioned in verse 23: "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us." (Source 5) This represents the "balanced Christian life." (Source 5)
- **The Role of the Holy Spirit:**
- The Holy Spirit is explicitly introduced in this section (3:24), and the Spirit "works assurance" in conjunction with God, Christ, and the believers' responsiveness (belief, obedience, love). (Source 5)

- The Spirit's presence can be understood as abiding "in us" individually and "among us" corporately, binding the community together. (Source 6)
- **Summons to Choose and Discernment:**
- The warning involves "agency"; readers must "choose to be a certain way." (Source 6)
- Believers are warned against "naive gullibility." (Source 6) "Beloved, don't believe every spirit. But test the spirits to see whether they're from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world." (Source 6)
- Love is not just a sentiment; it is "discerning." (Source 6)
- **Crucially, convictions about Jesus Christ are the test of spirits and ideas.** (Source 6) Getting "Jesus wrong" means not getting "God right." (Source 7)
- The test is whether a spirit "confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." (Source 6) This refers to the incarnation and is elaborated upon in John's Gospel, which reveals the invisible God through Christ's life and actions. (Source 7)
- There is a "spirit of the Antichrist" and "false prophets" who do not confess Jesus' incarnation. (Source 6)
- The readers are encouraged to "abide in the decision that you made that this is who Jesus really is." (Source 7)
- Modern movements that deny the traditional understanding of Christ (like "the myth of God incarnate" or the "Jesus Seminar") are examples of the perennial challenge of testing spirits. (Source 7)
- **Steadfastness and Overcoming:**
- Steadfastness and the ability to overcome the false spirits and the schismatic faction lie in "he who is with us and among us," who is "greater than the one in the world." (Source 8) God remains steadfast while movements and claims come and go. (Source 8)
- **Church division occurs when "the world gets the upper hand over the word."** (Source 8) "The world" can refer to creation loved by God, but also to "an idolatrous construct," a "rival to God," an authority that rejects transcendent help. (Source 8)
- Churches are "destroyed" when they stop listening to God's Word as authority and adopt the world's values and priorities instead, seeking acceptability from the world. (Source 8, 9)
- **The Apostolic Message as the Test:**
- The apostolic message and teaching "come from God" and are "the test of spirits." (Source 9)
- "We [apostles] are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God has not listened to us. By this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (Source 9)
- Continual engagement with Scripture and biblical teaching is necessary for "sharpening and refining and reminding about what God says and who God is" to discern truth from error. (Source 9)

Section 5: Foundational Imperative (4:7-14) - God's Love

This section shifts focus to the imperative to love, which is presented as foundational and intrinsically linked to knowing God, without diminishing the importance of faith or obedience.

- **God is Love:**
- "Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." (Source 9)
- "Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love." (Source 9)

- "God is love" is a statement magnifying God's love and its prominence in Christ, but it does not mean that love is an abstract attribute that can be substituted for the personal God. (Source 10) Love is an *attribute* of God that he *shares* with believers. (Source 10, 11)
- While humans, made in God's image, have a capacity for love, the kind of love John discusses is "possible through receiving the love of God that was shown in Christ." (Source 11)
- **The Measure of Love: Divine Action in Christ:**
- The measure of love is not "human feeling but divine action in Christ, and especially the atonement." (Source 11)
- "In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." (Source 11) Propitiation refers to Christ taking on the sins of others. (Source 11)
- This divine, sacrificial love is presented as the standard for love within Christian relationships, including marriage. (Source 11)
- **God's Love Catalyzes Ours:**
- "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another." (Source 11)
- God's actions towards us should stir us up to love each other. God is present and his commandments encourage this. (Source 12)
- **God's Love is Shown and Perfected in Us:**
- "No one has ever seen God" (the Father in his transcendent glory), but if "we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us." (Source 11, 12)
- "Perfected" means God's love achieves its intended effect when believers love each other. (Source 12)
- "Small gestures" of care and recognition within the Christian community are powerful expressions of love, even if they don't seem to "solve anything" on a large scale. They matter greatly to individuals, especially those who are lonely or elderly. (Source 12)
- **Loving is an Assurance of Abiding in God:**
- "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit." This "this" refers to loving one another as God has loved us. (Source 12, 13)
- Actively caring for others and praying for them are tangible ways to engage with God's love and increase one's assurance of abiding in God. (Source 12, 13)
- **Apostolic Testimony Reinforces Assurance:**
- John and other apostles ("we") "have seen and testified that the Father has sent his son to be the savior of the world." (Source 13) This direct witness to Jesus' earthly life (what they saw, heard, touched, handled) provides the foundation for the assurance offered to the readers. (Source 13)

Key Takeaways:

- Balanced Christian life involves faith, obedience, and love, which are inseparable.
- True believers are characterized by the practice of righteousness and love, not by a continued practice of sin.
- Love is the foundational message from the beginning and is expressed in active deeds, not just words or feelings.
- The recent schism highlights the importance of discernment; identifying true believers involves observing their actions and adherence to apostolic teaching.

- Assurance of salvation and abiding in God is rooted in God's character and the work of the Holy Spirit, not human effort or self-confidence.
- Testing spirits and ideas is crucial; the test centers on the confession of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh (the incarnation).
- Church division often results from adopting the "world's" values and authority over God's Word.
- Steadfastness against false teaching and worldly influence comes from recognizing Christ's greater presence within the community.
- "God is love" is a foundational truth, but love is an attribute of a personal God, not an abstract concept to be worshipped in itself.
- The ultimate measure and catalyst for our love is God's sacrificial action in sending Christ as propitiation for sins.
- Loving one another, even through small gestures, demonstrates the perfecting of God's love in us and provides assurance of our relationship with God through the Spirit.
- The apostolic testimony provides the historical and theological basis for the truth about God, Christ, and the nature of genuine faith and love.

Study Guide: Review of 1 John, Session 7: Full Scale Faith

Section 4 [3:9-4:6]: Central Warning - Beware of Cain's Error and False Prophets

- **Balancing Life in Christ:** This involves faith (doctrine of Christ), works (keeping commandments), and love (loving God and neighbor). These three aspects are interconnected and essential for a balanced Christian life.
- **The Central Warning:** This section warns against two main dangers: the error of Cain and false prophets.
- **Summons to Love: Identifying Children of God:** Those born of God do not make a practice of sinning; God's seed (Word or offspring) abides in them.
- **Contrast with Cain:** Cain was "of the evil one" and murdered his brother because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous. Not loving one's brother is a sign of not being of God and abiding in death.
- **Love as Action:** Love is not merely a concept or feeling but an activity, shown in deed and truth, particularly by being aware of and addressing the needs of others. This active love is a primary marker of being a child of God and an assurance of eternal life.
- **The World's Hate:** Christians should not be surprised if the world hates them, just as Cain hated his brother.
- **Confirmation of Love: Assurance in God's Character:** Assurance comes from trusting in God's character, not self-confidence. When our hearts condemn us, God is greater and knows everything. This is especially important during times of instability, such as church schisms.
- **Hallmarks of Gospel Reception:** Faith in Jesus Christ and loving one another are the core commandments. Keeping these commandments leads to abiding in God and God abiding in us.
- **The Role of the Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is introduced as working assurance in conjunction with God, the Son, and the believer's responsiveness (belief, obedience, love). The Spirit's indwelling is a confirmation of abiding in God.

- **Summons to Choose: Discerning Love:** Love is not naive gullibility but is discerning; it tests the spirits or influences around us.
- **Testing the Spirits:** The test is whether a spirit confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Confessions about Christ reveal the truth of claims and ideas. Getting Jesus wrong means getting God wrong.
- **The Spirit of the Antichrist:** This spirit denies that Jesus has come in the flesh. This is presented as a perennial force in the world.
- **Abiding in the Apostolic Message:** The apostolic witnesses (like John, Peter, James) saw, heard, and touched Jesus' earthly life. Believers are called to abide in the truth confessed by the apostles.
- **Confirmation of Choice: Steadfastness in God:** Believers have overcome the spirits and the schismatic faction because "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Steadfastness lies in God who is with and among believers.
- **Church Division:** Church division occurs when the world's values and authority gain ascendancy over God's word.
- **The Apostolic Message as the Test:** The apostolic message comes from God and serves as the test for distinguishing the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. Studying the Bible and hearing teaching based on it are crucial for discernment.

Section 5 [4:7-14]: Foundational Imperative - God's Love

- **The Foundational Imperative:** This section focuses on the importance of loving God and others.
- **First Exhortation to Love: Love is from God:** Loving one another is essential because love originates from God. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God.
- **God is Love:** This means God's love is powerful and prominent in His self-disclosure. While love is an attribute of God, God is a person and not merely an abstract concept of love. God can share His attribute of love with His people.
- **Manifestation of God's Love:** God's love was made manifest by sending His only Son into the world so that we might have life through Him.
- **The Measure of Love:** The measure of love is not human feeling but God's divine action in Christ, specifically His sending His Son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins. God's love is the model for human love.
- **Second Exhortation to Love: God's Love Catalyzes Ours:** Because God so loved us, we ought to love one another. God is present with us to encourage this love.
- **God's Love is Shown and Perfected:** No one has seen God the Father, but if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected (completes its intended effect) in us. Small gestures of care are expressions of this perfected love.
- **Response to the Spirit and Assurance:** Responding to the Spirit by loving others is an assurance of abiding in God, and vice versa.
- **Apostolic Testimony:** John testifies from his direct witness of Jesus' earthly life that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, offering assurance to his readers.

Quiz

1. According to Dr. Yarbrough, what three aspects does John alternate between emphasizing in 1 John, and how do they relate to a balanced Christian life?
2. In Section 4 of 1 John, what two main dangers does John warn his readers against?

3. According to the text, what is the message that the readers have heard "from the beginning," and what contrast does John draw to illustrate this message?
4. How does the text describe the difference between love as an abstract concept and love as John presents it?
5. In the wake of the church schism, where does John say assurance lies for believers whose hearts might condemn them or who feel unstable?
6. According to the text, what two things constitute God's commandment that believers are to keep?
7. How does John instruct his readers to discern whether spirits, or influences and ideas, are from God?
8. What is the central test that reveals whether or not claims or ideas are true, according to the text, and why is this test so important?
9. According to the text, what causes church division to occur?
10. How does the text define the "measure of love," and what action is highlighted as the ultimate example of this love?

Quiz Answer Key

1. John alternates between emphasizing matters of faith (like the doctrine of Christ), matters of works (like keeping commandments), and matters of love (loving God and neighbor). These three are interconnected and essential for a balanced Christian life where faith works in love.
2. In Section 4 of 1 John, John warns against the error of Cain (characterized by hate and lovelessness towards brothers) and the danger of false prophets (who deny the truth about Jesus Christ).
3. The message from the beginning is that "we should love one another." John contrasts this with the example of Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.
4. The text describes love as more than an abstract concept; for John, it is a verb, an activity shown in deed and truth. It's the direct result of a relationship and shows itself in awareness of and concern for the needs of other people.
5. In the wake of the schism, John says assurance lies in God's character, not our self-confidence. When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything, providing a stability that transcends human finitude and instability.
6. According to the text, God's commandment is that believers "believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another."
7. John instructs his readers to "test the spirits" to see whether they are from God. The test is whether a spirit confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.
8. The central test is the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This test is important because what you think about Christ defines what you think about God; getting Jesus wrong means not getting God right.
9. According to the text, church division occurs when the world gets the upper hand over the word of God. This happens when churches stop listening to God as the authority and the world becomes their authority, leading them to champion worldly ideas.
10. The text defines the "measure of love" not by human feeling but by divine action in Christ, especially the atonement. The sending of God's Son to be the propitiation for our sins is highlighted as the ultimate example of this divine love.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the concept of "balancing life in Christ" as presented in the text, explaining the relationship between faith, works, and love and how John's writing style reflects this balance.
2. Analyze John's use of the example of Cain in Section 4. What specific points is he making about the nature of sin, righteousness, and the relationship between believers through this comparison?
3. Explain the role of the Holy Spirit in providing assurance to believers in 1 John, according to the text. How does the Spirit work in conjunction with God, the Son, and the believer's response to confirm their abiding in God?
4. Elaborate on John's instruction to "test the spirits." What are the different ways the text describes these "spirits," what is the critical test for discerning them, and why is this discernment crucial for believers?
5. Discuss the assertion "God is love" within the context of Section 5. What does this statement mean according to the text, what does it *not* mean, and how is this concept of God's love presented as the foundation and catalyst for believers' love for one another?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Balancing Life in Christ:** A term describing the integrated Christian life encompassing faith (doctrine), works (obedience), and love (relationship with God and neighbor), as taught in the Johannine epistles.
- **Faith:** Belief in Jesus Christ and the doctrine of Christ. One of the three key aspects of a balanced Christian life.
- **Works:** Keeping God's commandments and practicing righteousness. Another key aspect of a balanced Christian life.
- **Love:** Devotion to God and loving one's neighbor, shown actively in deed and truth. The third key aspect of a balanced Christian life.
- **Schism:** A division or separation, particularly in a religious community, referred to in the text as having caused distress and instability for the believers.
- **Cain's Error:** The sin exemplified by Cain, characterized by being "of the evil one," hating one's brother, and murder, contrasted with the righteous deeds of his brother Abel.
- **False Prophets:** Individuals or influences that promote teachings contrary to the truth, specifically denying the apostolic witness about Jesus Christ having come in the flesh.
- **God's Seed:** Refers to either the Word of God abiding in a believer or believers as God's offspring abiding in God. A sign of being born of God.
- **Abiding:** To remain or dwell in someone or something, used to describe believers abiding in God/Christ, God/Christ abiding in believers, God's seed abiding in believers, or those who don't love abiding in death.
- **Children of God:** Those who have been born of God, characterized by not making a practice of sinning, practicing righteousness, and loving their brothers.
- **Children of the Devil:** Those who do not practice righteousness or love their brothers, exemplified by Cain.
- **Love in Deed and Truth:** Love expressed through actions and genuine concern for others, rather than merely in word or talk.

- **Assurance:** The confidence believers can have in their relationship with God and possession of eternal life, based on God's character, obedience to commandments, love for one another, and the indwelling Spirit.
- **Test the Spirits:** The act of discerning the source and truthfulness of ideas, claims, teachings, influencers, and spiritual powers, to determine if they are from God or not.
- **Confess that Jesus Christ has Come in the Flesh:** The critical test for discerning spirits, affirming the truth of the incarnation and the apostolic witness to Jesus' earthly life.
- **Spirit of the Antichrist:** A spirit that denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, presented as being in the world already.
- **Apostolic Message/Witness:** The teachings and testimony of the apostles (like John, Peter, James) who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' earthly life, serving as the standard for discerning truth from error.
- **The World:** Can refer to the created world, but also an "idolatrous construct" or a "rival to God," characterized by rejecting God's authority and championing things contrary to God's word.
- **Foundational Imperative:** The call to love one another, presented as a fundamental command rooted in the nature of God's love.
- **God is Love:** A statement emphasizing the powerful and prominent nature of God's love in His self-disclosure, particularly through Christ.
- **Manifest:** To be made evident or shown clearly, used to describe how God's love was made manifest among believers through the sending of His Son.
- **Propitiation:** An atoning sacrifice that turns away wrath, referring to Jesus' death for our sins, which is presented as the measure of God's love.
- **Perfect Love:** God's love completing its intended effect, particularly as it is shown and expressed when believers love one another.
- **Catalyst:** Something that causes a reaction or change, used to describe how God's love for us catalyzes our love for one another.

FAQs:

What is the central message of 1 John regarding Christian life?

- The central message revolves around balancing three interconnected aspects: faith, works (keeping commandments), and love. These elements are presented as inseparable components of a healthy, growing Christian life. When John emphasizes one, the others are implicitly present, illustrating a holistic approach to living in Christ.
- What specific warning does John give in 1 John 3:9-4:6?
- John warns against the error exemplified by Cain and the influence of false prophets. This warning is framed within a summons to love, contrasting the hateful actions of those who have separated from the community with the love that is characteristic of those born of God. It encourages readers to discern between true believers, who practice righteousness and love, and those who act out of an "evil" nature, as Cain did.
- How does John define "love" in these sections of 1 John?
- For John, love is not merely an abstract concept or a feeling, but a tangible activity and action. It is a direct result of a relationship with God and manifests in an awareness of and concern for the needs of others. Demonstrating practical love, such as sharing

resources with those in need, is presented as a primary indicator of being a child of God and an assurance of possessing eternal life.

- How does John address the instability caused by schism or division within the Christian community?
- John seeks to stabilize his readers by anchoring their assurance in God's character rather than their own feelings or the unsettling circumstances of division. He reminds them that "God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything," providing a foundation for confidence even when their hearts condemn them or when external events cause trauma.
- What are the key hallmarks of gospel reception according to John?
- John identifies faith (believing in Jesus Christ), obedience (keeping God's commandments), and love for one another as the core hallmarks of receiving the gospel. These three elements are presented together as defining a balanced Christian life.
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of a believer, as mentioned in these passages?
- The Holy Spirit is introduced as working in conjunction with God and the Son to provide assurance to believers. As individuals respond to God through belief, obedience, and love, the Spirit confirms God's presence abiding in them and among them, fostering a corporate sense of belonging and steadfastness.
- How can believers discern between the "spirit of truth" and the "spirit of error"?
- John calls believers to "test the spirits," emphasizing that love does not equate to naive gullibility. Convictions about Jesus Christ, specifically the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, serve as the crucial test. Ideas, claims, teachings, and even spiritual powers that deny this fundamental truth are identified as being from the "spirit of the Antichrist" or the "spirit of error," originating from the world and in opposition to God and the apostolic message.
- How does God's love catalyze and perfect the love of believers for one another?
- God's love, supremely demonstrated in sending His Son as a propitiation for sins, serves as the model and motivation for believers to love one another. When believers love each other, God's love is "perfected" or completed in its intended effect within them and the community. This reciprocal love among believers is a powerful manifestation of God's abiding presence and a tangible assurance of their relationship with Him.