

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Balancing Life in Christ; Session 8, 1 John, Full Scale Faith. Section 6 [4:15-5:15] Necessary Instruction, Section 7 [5:16-21] Concluding Admonition

This is Dr. Robert Yarbrough and his teaching on the Johannine Epistles, Balancing Life in Christ. This is session 8, 1 John, Full Scale Faith. Section 6, [4:15-5:15] Necessary Instruction; Section 7, [5:16-21] Concluding Admonition.

We come to the last of our lectures in John's Letters, and we're talking about John's Letters, especially in terms of balancing life in Christ, and that life begins with faith in Jesus, and that faith blossoms into obeying his commands and walking as he did. But what makes that all alive and real is that the love of God enters into our lives, and we have a personal relationship with God, so we have faith and we have response to the teachings of Christ, the teachings of Scripture, the teachings of the Old and New Testament, to the extent that they're relevant for our time and our lives.

And faith, works, and love are the things that are produced that give the whole and the Balanced Christian life. And I'm calling these lectures on, first, John, full-scale faith, full-scale faith, or you could call it full-package faith. It's everything that faith should be.

It's not just believing in some idea or doctrine or even believing in the truth about Jesus. It's trusting in Christ in such a way that God enters into our lives by His Spirit and changes our devotion. Our devotion, perhaps, was to ourselves or was just to making a living.

Our devotion transforms into prioritizing God's priorities and not ours, and finding our direction and focus in God's counsel, God's guidance, God's kingdom, and not the one that we might have been building on our own. So, we've looked at several sections. We've seen the central burden of 1 John: God is light.

We've seen the central commandment, which is to embody the age-old message of loving one another. We've talked about the key counsel that John gives, which is to abide in Christ and receive eternal life. We've considered his warning, which is also an encouragement to love one another, not to be hateful like Cain was and killed Abel.

In the last lecture, we ended talking about the foundational imperative. If there's one command that emerges out of 1 John, along with faith and the truth about Christ and the quality of relationship with God that we call love, it is to love one another, and that grows out of God's love. And we conclude now by looking at the last two

sections, and these sections come from the way that the Greek New Testament was divided in the Byzantine period.

So before English versions had their chapters and verses, the Byzantine church, for a thousand years and probably still today, when they read their Bible in church worship, these are the divisions that they observe. And so I'm following these divisions, and then I'm just describing what I see in each of the divisions, and that's how I'm dividing up 1 John. It makes it look a little different than the five chapters, but that's partly intentional on my part.

I know that everybody has read 1 John. It's a simple book. It's a short book.

You know what the five chapters are, and I find it helps me to look at it differently to see how other people over a thousand years divided it, and it made sense to them in these ways. And so, I'm trying to make it say a little something different from looking at it in a different order. There are two sections here.

One is a necessary instruction, and that instruction has to do with believing in Jesus. And then there's a concluding admonition, and we'll look at these two in turn. First of all, section 6, necessary instruction, believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And we see this breaks down into five sub-sections, and I'll just read them as we go to them, A through E. First, we get an invitation, but this is an invitation that's really a declaration, and it's an invitation that has support for it. There's a warrant that John presents. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. Notice all of the red letters in that yellow section, and that just reminds us of how God-centered and Christ-centered 1 John is overall.

It's a book about God. It's a book about Christ. We can say that about those verses; we just read something wonderful.

Valid confession of Jesus, whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, and he means that in the full and pregnant sense of all the other places in his letters where he talks about Jesus, and Jesus come in the flesh, and Jesus being the propitiation for our sins, and Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah, the promise deliverer from God. Whoever confesses that Jesus opens the door, that confession opens the door to God's presence and God's assurance. God abides in him, and he in him, and it's confirmed by believers' love.

We've come to know and to believe the love that God has for us, and God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. So, the second half of that, verse 16, notice it grows out of the confession, the true confession of Jesus. So, people love to separate this out and reduce Christianity to love, love one another, or keep his commandments.

But we see again and again in John, one of these things grows out of the other. It's an implication of the other, and we can't ever separate them. So, as we look at this overarching section, this necessary instruction, we start first with this invitation to confess, to believe, to love.

Then we get a commendation of this love, why this love is perfected with us so that we have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There's no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.

If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. In this commandment, we have from him that whoever loves God must also love his brother. Notice number one in verse 17, that a believer's expression of love is an offense against the fear of judgment.

This love is perfected so we'll have confidence in the day of judgment. We don't need to think about judgment all the time, but there are times when we will, and there are times when we should, because this is one of God's promises and God's actions. God upholds righteousness in the world, and at the personal level, at the social level, at the historical level, in the course of time, things rise and fall, and we can often correlate them with the decadence of people.

And in the Bible, we see over and over again God judging people, and the Bible teaches, as Hebrews does, it's appointed for man once to die, and after this comes judgment. So, we want to emphasize life, love, faith, and obeying God, but we're foolish if we deny the reality that someday we will die, and then we will be assessed. How did we live? Who did we trust? How did we love? And one of the benefits of knowing God's love and letting God's love be perfected in us is that it defends us against the fear of judgment, because as we grow in that love, we become more and more aware that God has claimed us, and God will not condemn us.

As Paul says, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. A second takeaway from letter B here, commendation of love, our love grows out of God's prior love for us. John 1:13 says we were born of God.

God had a hand in our redemption that's bigger than our own hand in believing. And verse 19 says, very curtly, very shortly, we love, if we're in a relationship with God through faith in Christ, the love we have grows out of what he did first on our behalf, and it's continuing manifestation in our life. This is a commendation of love that does us the great service of making it unmistakably clear where our love comes from at its best.

It comes from a work of God. Thirdly, love for God without love for other believers is a contradiction in terms. You can't say with authenticity, I love God, and disregard your brother, because if you don't love your brother, whom you do see, you can't love God, whom you can't see.

It's irrefutable logic. Next, there is a commendation of faith, but a certain kind of faith. I'm going to fancy here and throw the Latin phrase in.

Commendation of faith in the sense of *fides qua creditor*, and this can be defined, the Latin there can be defined as the faith by which we believe, or my faith, or our personal faith, and that contrasts with another sense of faith I'll get to in a minute. But here John commends personal faith in Christ. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

It probably means other believers, but this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? Now, this is a contradiction in terms of faith, and it is a contradiction in terms of love.

Notice, first of all, that faith is a verb arising from God's regenerating work and resulting in love. Everyone who believes loves, and believing there is not a static concept, it's an action. It's a projection of my ability to decide and to commit in the direction of Jesus Christ.

So, I'm going to coin a word, *faithing*, you know, faith as an action. *Faithing* results in loving and obeying God, verses 2 and 3. By this, we know we love when we love and obey. So, he moves from believing in verse 1 to loving and obeying in 2 and 3. And those commandments that we obey, let's be honest, sometimes they do seem burdensome, but when our hearts are right, God's commands are a delight.

How blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the path of sinners, sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the Torah, the guidance, the teaching of the Lord. And in his Torah, in his teaching, he meditates

day and night. Faith results in a love for God that learns to delight in doing the things that please God.

Number 3, through our faith, our believing, remember we're talking about it as a verb here, through our believing comes victory over the world. Because this faith invites Christ onto the scene of our lives, into the core of our existence, and into the whole horizon of our outlook. Faith overcomes the world, which is a rival to God in John's terminology, because faith brings Jesus, the Son of God, onto the scene.

So, John commends personal faith here in the course of giving necessary instruction. It's very necessary that we be confirmed in the teaching that we need to and that we can, that we have the privilege of believing in Jesus. But now he's going to commend faith in a different sense.

This is not *fides qua*, Q-U-A, this is *fides quae*, Q-U-A-E. And that means the faith that is believed. There is my personal faith, but what am I faithing, what am I believing in? And I'm believing in a Jesus who did certain things that have a certain meaning and a certain significance.

And you can sort of quantify that, and you could confess it. And actually, the church from way back in the second century has had a confession, it's called today the Apostles' Creed, and it says some very definite things about Jesus. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, was buried, he descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, he will come from there to judge the living and the dead.

That's the faith. That's the Christian faith when it comes to Jesus. It's an outline of some of the things that he did and the reasons why we equate him with God the Father.

I believe in God the Father, I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, I believe in the third article of the Creed, the Holy Spirit. That's a statement of the Christian faith. And John commends the Christian faith here.

He's already commended my believing, your believing. And it's a great thing when you believe, but you've got to believe in what the faith is. Faith in faith, or just generic faith, is not true faith.

It's got to be faith in who Christ really showed himself to be, who showed God as he is. This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not by the water only, but by the water and the blood.

And the Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.

For this is the testimony of God that he is born concerning his Son. Notice that. This is the testimony of God.

This is the truth about what we place our faith in. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.

And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Some observations. Number one, the water and the blood in verse six, most likely Christ's baptism and his crucifixion. Now, there are other theories about that.

I'm not going to go into them. I'm just going to say this is probably Jesus coming early in his ministry. He was, in John's gospel, he's called the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by John the Baptist.

And John baptized him, and this inaugurated his messianic ministry. And then he came also to die, and he bled and shed his blood for sin. Secondly, the Spirit and the Son and the Father, all through this passage, notice the red letters.

You've got Jesus Christ or you've got the Son, you've got God, you've got the Spirit. They all testify that Jesus Christ came. He carried out his mission.

He fulfilled his mission. And this is part of the fides quae. This is the faith.

Jesus fulfilled his mission as the Son of God. Thirdly, believers resonate with the declarations of this paragraph. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

So, the faith is present in my faith, my faith as a believer. Now, John wants to reemphasize this because he's just had a bunch of people who left the church or the churches, and one of the reasons they left is that they did not believe in Jesus Christ coming in the sense that John is presenting it here. There was something about Jesus that was different.

That he didn't die for sin or that he wasn't the Son of God. There are a lot of ways you can go wrong in how you conceive of Jesus. But John is near the end of his letter.

He's reemphasizing what it is we believe about Jesus that enables him to do the great things that we attribute to him. And believers resonate with those declarations. And if you don't resonate, then you need to brush up your knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God, and expand your horizons and make sure that you're tapped into the God who has revealed himself in Jesus in his fullness, who came and did all the things the scripture tells us that he did and invites us to have faith in.

Fourthly, what we are called to believe about Christ results in eternal life if we receive what he has done. It also results in the opposite if we reject it. You know, earlier we saw that the schismatics have left.

They have a different view of Jesus. In 3 John, we read about Diotrephes. He did not accept John's authority, and he put out people who tried to push the apostolic view of things.

They were not going to have eternal life unless they made some changes. Whoever has the Son has life. And God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

So, this is a wonderful commendation of the faith by which God does his work of claiming sinners for himself, making them part of his family, and enlisting us in the assemblies of God, of Christ around the world that hear his voice, share his saving message and live out his love to each other and to the larger world. We come to our seventh section in 1 John. This is a concluding admonition, and he's going to talk about the true God and also the threat of impostors.

So first, counsel regarding sinners and sin. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death.

I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. Many pages are written about these verses, and there is no widespread agreement among commentators on exactly what's being said here, and I won't try to solve the problem in this lecture, but I'll try to say a few things that I think are plausible applications or interpretations of what John is saying.

One thing I think we can say is that believers serve each other, love each other, not by condemning each other's inevitable sins, because we're all going to sin, but we're going to sin. But we shouldn't be keeping track of each other's sins or condemning each other. We should pray when we see somebody do something wrong.

Now that may not be all we should do. Maybe we need to talk with them. Maybe we need to try to understand what they're doing and if they're struggling with something, maybe there's a way we can help them with that.

But this shows us, I think, that John doesn't think, although he said earlier no one who's born of God sins, but he knows in the community of faith that believers are going to stumble, and so we should pray for restoration. He says there is a sin that leads to death, and I do not say that one should pray for that. I think this relates to what I'm saying here with number two.

Some sins are headed in a terminal direction. There are sins that lead to separation from God. And in the broader context of 1 John, I would suggest these would include sins of unbelief, like you're in the church but you don't believe in Christ, or you're not in the church and you don't believe in Christ.

It would be sins like lawlessness. He said sin is sin, but then some kind of sins are, they are drastic rebellion against God. Maybe even, I mean, sometimes in this discussion, people bring in what Jesus calls the unpardonable sin, people who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

And I do think there is a relationship. I don't know what the exact relationship is, but certainly that's a sin to death. If Jesus says those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, that is definitely a terminal sin.

So, some sins are terminal, and he says I do not say that one should pray for that. I think he's saying not all believers should involve themselves in interceding for every sin that they may learn of. The end of Jude talks about showing mercy on people, but doing so in some cases with fear, because sometimes it's a hazardous thing to involve yourself in the life of someone who's in behavior that's very destructive and could be injurious to your own health if you get involved in trying to help them.

There are plenty of cases where people have been trying to help others, and they've gotten entangled in it, and it's taken them down, too. And from the outside, it may be hard to tell whether someone's sin is a sin unto death or not a sin unto death. So, John is not saying, look, whatever you see people doing, jump on it and hang with it until you fix them.

Sins unto death you're not going to fix. And I think here, if you read the whole book of Jeremiah, you'll see that in the book of Jeremiah, he had something like 40 years or more of a ministry to a city and a people that were turning away from God, and God was going to judge them. And he wrestled with his ministry, but in the whole, he loved those people.

He was committed to those people. And three different times, God had to tell Jeremiah, Quit praying for these people. And the reason was that when we enlist ourselves in compassion and prayer for people, we identify with them, and it's not impossible that we'll kind of go over to their side and become more sympathetic to them than we are toward God.

And apparently God could feel Jeremiah becoming so upset by the judgment that these people are going to undergo at God's hand that he said, I want you to get some separation. Come back to me. You're getting too upset by this.

I'll handle what's upsetting you, but you've got to stay faithful in your proclamation to these people so that those who might repent will have a chance to do so. So, this is another example of how love is discerning. We may love people that we see going astray, but we can't let love for people that we see going astray lead us astray from God.

And it can happen. So, John doesn't say don't pray for them. He says, I don't say you should pray.

You have to make up your own mind about how much to get involved with people who may be sinning in such a way that it leads to death. We wouldn't know in this life, because until they die, we don't know if their sins has led them into a separation from God that's eternal. Some people repent of their sins on their deathbed.

Last observation here, verse 17, all wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. So, this is a sin that we can confess and be forgiven of. And this is a sin that Jesus came to take away, and he does take it away.

Not all sins are equal. Not all sinning is equal. So don't give up on your struggle against sin just because you say, well, sin is sin and I'm guilty of sin, so why worry about it? Some sins are really indicative of a heart that does not know God.

And we just don't want to be anywhere in that proximity. And through God's grace and faith, there's no reason why we should languish in a state of fear of judgment that we're not forgiven. There is assurance of salvation.

John concludes his letter in this section, which I'm calling the concluding admonition, the true God, and the threat of impostors. He's given counsel regarding sin and sinners. And now he's going to talk about what I call the tide that binds and his final pastoral appeal.

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he was born of God, and that protects him. That is to say, Christ, who was born of God, also protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding. You can translate that also insight, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true in his son, Jesus Christ.

He is the true God and eternal life. Notice in each of those three verses, we know that, we know that, we know that. You know, these are fides qua kind of statements.

These are statements of the Christian faith. These are certainties on which we can build personal faith. And these statements assure readers of their identity.

First of all, in verse 18, we know that everyone born of God does not keep on sinning. He's protected. The evil one doesn't touch him.

That's our identity. Also, protection and origin. And I've said identity twice here.

I guess it's really true. Who we are, we are from God. And we know what Christ has done and who he is.

We know that the Son of God has come and given us insight into all that John has said. So that we can know him who is true, that knowing is the Z coordinate.

It's the love line. It's the relationship with God. It's the rapport we have with God.

We may know him and we are in him, the true one, Jesus Christ. And this is one of those verses in scripture. They don't do it all the time, but they call the Son of God, God.

He is the Greek pronoun. There is autos. It's the mere demonstrative, the near demonstrative pronoun.

It means this person here. So, it can be translated, he could also translate this one, the Son, Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life.

That's the tie that binds us. We share certainties about what God has done, who God is. And that's really the bedrock of Christian fellowship.

It's not just that we like each other or that we like the meals that we bring to the potluck dinners. Our bedrock for fellowship is the identity of the God who has claimed us together. In the final pastoral appeal, little children, there's that word again, that devotion and commitment of an older believer to everybody else.

An apostolic believer who is so humble he calls himself an elder in his other letters. Keep yourselves from idols. Ephesus had a history of idol veneration.

If you read Acts 19, when the church was founded, the idol makers rioted because Christians were bad for their business. Everybody bought idols. So that's one sense in which we can talk about idols.

But if we speak more broadly, the word idol, eidolon, is actually cognate with our word idea. It's something that you imagine. And in the Greco-Roman world, the various ethnicities and the various regions all had deities.

Now, none of them were real, but they were spiritual manifestations that people believed in. And the Greek dictionary of this word, called the Bauer, Denker, Arndt, and Gingrich dictionary, defines this word as deities of the nations that have no reality and so are truly the products of fantasy. And they are manufactured by human hands, if you think of them in terms of some kind of effigy, some silver or wood or gold or stone, kind of a little statue.

But I don't think he's here warning so much about statues. I think he's warning about the things that people imagine about Christ, or about God's commandments, or about the relationship with God that he's been warning about for five chapters. Things that are, we say, half a bubble off.

Things that aren't right or true. And we throw ourselves into a religious commitment that's invalid because it's a fantasy. We hear today, we've heard for years, I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious.

I believe in spirituality, but I don't believe in church. I don't believe in God, I don't believe in Christ, but I'm a very spiritual person. That's fantasy.

And I suppose it's good if it makes you feel good, but this is what John is warning about. Guard yourself against imagining things that you should find out the truth about in scripture, and you should have confirmed in your life in the Christian community. And you should be growing in as God's love is perfected in you.

And as your understanding of Christ and his magnificence and his oneness with the Father grows. And as your life is more and more characterized by walking in the way and the teaching that God has for his children. These are great goals and great roads of progress that are out there ahead of us for all of us, but we can get derailed by fantasies.

So, let's not go there. Readers of 1 John or hearers of 1 John could imagine many variations of what is only truly known through faith, leading to works as an expression of love. That is full-scale faith.

John concludes by calling for vigilance against counterfeits. And he calls for the maintenance of their little children's status as men and women of true faith. And I love it that in the last verse he calls them little children.

He calls them back to who we all really are. We're children of a God who is radically dependent on his steadfastness and grace, which is never in short supply. But what is sometimes in short supply is the humility we need and the reality check we need to encourage us to stay attuned to and with the true God who has appeared in Jesus Christ.

So, I commend that God to you. I commend the God who is light. The message is to love one another, the message to believe, to follow the commandments, and to enjoy the love of God.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for holy scripture. Thank you for what you brought John through and the lessons that you taught him.

Thank you for the lessons that he taught to the community in his day and time. And we pray that you would walk and work among us, teach us these lessons, and help us to be the church in our day that you called on the church in John's day to be. To your glory in this world and into eternity in Christ's name, amen.

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