

The Johannine Epistles: Balancing Life in Christ

Session 2B: Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John

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Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Abiding, World, Son, Love, Sin, Knowledge, Hearing, Commandment, Father, Persecution

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Robert Yarbrough analyzes pivotal theological terms across the Johannine Epistles (1, 2, and 3 John), focusing on abiding, world, Son, love, sin, knowing, hearing, commandment, and Father. He contrasts John's divine encouragement for believers facing persecution and martyrdom ('the faithful dying') with sharp warnings for lukewarm believers living a compromised faith ('the lax'). Through these linguistic and thematic studies, Yarbrough demonstrates how abiding in Christ's teaching, confessing the Son, and obeying God's commandments provide unshakeable assurance and spiritual vitality amidst worldly opposition.

Outline

I. Introduction to Johannine Theological Themes (Session 2B)

- A. Overview of core vocabulary in 1, 2, and 3 John
- B. Dual audience framework: The faithful dying vs. the lax (bloodless religion)

II. Abiding (Menō)

- A. High frequency in 1 John (24x) and 2 John (3x)
- B. Message for the faithful dying: God's saving Word imparts an enduring divine presence during persecution
- C. Message for the lax: Departing from Christ's teaching signifies a lack of a true saving relationship (2 John 9)

III. World (Kosmos)

- A. Key occurrences and concept in 1 John (23x)
- B. Message for the faithful dying: The imposing, hostile world is passing away (1 John 2:17, 3:13)
- C. Message for the lax: Warning against worldly religious substitutes and false prophets (1 John 4:1, 4:5)

IV. Son (Huios)

- A. Central Christological designation for Jesus (22x)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Assurance of present realized and future eternal life (1 John 5:11–13, 5:20)

C. Message for the lax: Passive moralism or assent without confessing the Son is denial of the Father (1 John 2:22–23)

V. Love (Agapē / Agapaō)

A. Primary divine attribute and community command (18x in 1 John, 2x in 2 John, 1x in 3 John)

B. Message for the faithful dying: God's perfected love casts out fear of judgment during suffering (1 John 4:16–18)

C. Message for the lax: Loving the world is incompatible with love for the Father (1 John 2:15)

VI. Sin (Hamartia)

A. Theological diagnosis of human condition (17x in 1 John)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Assurance of forgiveness through Christ's propitiation (1 John 1:7, 4:10)

C. Message for the lax: Habitual lawlessness (anomia) cannot presume upon divine grace (1 John 3:4–5)

VII. Knowing (Oida)

A. Intuitive conviction / settled knowledge distinct from experiential learning (ginōskō)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Hope in Christ's return and final transformation (1 John 3:2)

C. Message for the lax: Genuine life in Christ is proven by self-sacrificial love for fellow believers (1 John 3:14)

VIII. Hearing (Akouō)

A. Importance of divine hearing and response (14x)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Confidence that God hears and answers prayers aligned with His will (1 John 5:14–15)

C. Message for the lax: Hearing the original message requires continuous ethical walking in Christ's commands (2 John 6)

IX. Commandment (Entolē)

A. Essential mark of active discipleship (14x)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Keeping commandments brings spiritual assurance and divine indwelling (1 John 3:23–24)

C. Message for the lax: Disregarding God's commandments reveals a false confession (1 John 2:4, 5:3)

X. Father (Patēr)

A. Supreme relational identity of God (14x in 1 John, 4x in 2 John)

B. Message for the faithful dying: Astonishing adoption into God's family despite world alienation (1 John 3:1)

C. Message for the lax: Loving the world excludes the Father's love; warning against pride and desires (1 John 2:15–16)