

1 John: Total Faith and the Central Burden (1 John 1:1–2:6)

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Abstract

Dr. Robert Yarbrough introduces the exposition of 1 John 1:1–2:6 by focusing on the epistle's central burden that "God is light," contrasting biblical monotheism with the dark, impersonal paganism of the Greco-Roman world. He develops a three-dimensional coordinate model of Christian identity that balances doctrinal faith (X-axis), moral obedience (Y-axis), and personal agape love (Z-axis). Anchored in historical apostolic eyewitness testimony of the incarnate Word, the message calls believers to joyful communion with God through genuine confession of sin and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. Ultimately, Yarbrough demonstrates that authentic Christian assurance requires abiding in Christ by harmonizing sound belief, ethical obedience, and sacrificial love.

Outline

I. Introduction and Series Context (1 John 1:1–2:6)

- A. Overview of preceding introductory, theological, and epistle lectures (2 & 3 John)
 - 1. 3 John: Letter to a trusted friend (Gaius)
 - 2. 2 John: Letter to a trusted church
 - 3. 1 John: Intended for broad application across churches in Asia Minor
- B. Series overarching themes: "Balancing Life in Christ" and "Total Faith"
 - 1. Assumption of a balanced Christian life rooted in multiple interdependent factors
 - 2. Focus on total faith in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- C. Prominence of Love ("Agape" / "Agapao") in Johannine Literature
 - 1. Statistical frequency of love terminology compared across New Testament Gospels and Epistles
 - 2. John as the "Apostle of Love" reflecting intense textual density of divine love

II. Ancient Greek / Byzantine Lectionary Division System

- A. Historical seven-part division of 1 John in Byzantine Greek manuscripts
 - 1. Predates modern chapter and verse divisions in Latin Vulgate or English traditions
 - 2. Used as lectionary reading markers for public liturgical worship in the Eastern Church

B. Identification of the First Section (1 John 1:1–2:6)

1. Designated as the "Central Burden" of the epistle
2. Defined by the primary theological assertion: "God is Light"

III. Theological Context: Greco-Roman World vs. Biblical Monotheism

A. Spiritual condition of the Greco-Roman world

1. Polytheistic Roman society deeply marked by moral and spiritual darkness
2. Pagan religion lacked sacred authoritative Scriptures and ethical/moral imperatives
3. Focus on transactional religious experience without personal divine relationship

B. Distinctiveness of Biblical Revelation

1. God as Creator and Redeemer entering into personal covenantal relationships
2. The foundational apostolic message: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)

IV. Evangelical Identity and the Three-Dimensional Model of Faith

A. Theological nature of Evangelical Identity (John 1:12–13)

1. Divine birth vs. human initiative (compatibilism of human faith and divine sovereignty)
2. Salvation as an unmerited divine gift transforming human life

B. The 3D Coordinate Model for Balanced Christian Living

1. X-Axis (Horizontal): Doctrinal Belief / Faith (Transition from unbelief to trusting Christ)
2. Y-Axis (Vertical): Moral Obedience / Works (Ethical conduct and alignment with God's commands)
3. Z-Axis (Depth): Personal Relationship / Agape Love (Intimate fellowship with God and others)

C. Analysis of Spiritual Imbalances (The Eight Octants/Compartments)

1. True Believer Octant: Harmonious integration of sound faith, moral obedience, and personal love
2. Warning of Matthew 7:22–23: Performing works and claiming faith without relational knowing ("I never knew you")
3. Misguided pathways: Intellectual orthodoxy lacking moral fruit, or moral ethics lacking Christian faith

V. Exposition of 1 John 1:1–2:6

A. Apostolic Authority and Historical Incarnation (1 John 1:1–4)

1. Reality of the incarnate Word of Life (heard, seen, contemplated, and touched)
2. Eyewitness testimony meeting the Deuteronomic legal standard of multiple witnesses
3. Purpose of apostolic proclamation: Shared fellowship and full, perfected joy

B. The Character of God and Walking in the Light (1 John 1:5–10)

1. Absolute holiness, purity, and transcendence of God as Light

2. Refutation of false confessions (claiming fellowship while walking in darkness; claiming sinlessness)
3. Path to true fellowship: Walking in the light, confessing sins, and receiving cleansing through Christ's blood

C. Pastoral Directives, Advocacy, and Obedience (1 John 2:1–6)

1. Pastoral purpose: Exhortation to avoid sin while recognizing divine provision when sin occurs
2. Jesus Christ as Advocate with the Father and Propitiation (satisfying divine wrath for believers and world benefit)
3. Test of genuine knowledge: Keeping God's commandments and walking as Jesus walked