

The Johannine Epistles: Balancing Life in Christ

Session 6: 1 John, Full-Scale Faith (1 John 2:7–3:8)

Author: Dr. Robert Yarbrough

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Robert Yarbrough examines 1 John 2:7–3:8, focusing on the central commandment of Christian love and the key counsel to remain in Christ's anointing. He stresses that true spiritual maturity integrates growing faith, obedience to God's word, and active relational love, warning that indifference toward others constitutes walking in darkness. Yarbrough calls believers to reject worldly vainglory and remain anchored in apostolic truth amidst the threat of deceivers and church division. Ultimately, abiding in Christ equips Christians with confidence, spiritual strength, and the practical exercise of righteousness as they await Christ's return.

Outline

I. Section 2: Central Commandment — Embodying the Age-Old Message (1 John 2:7–17)

A. The Nature and Implications of the Message (2:7–11)

1. An Old and New Commandment (2:7–8)

- a. Precedent in the Old Testament and explicit fulfillment in Jesus' life and teachings to love God and neighbor.
- b. New in redemptive history because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining (cf. Romans 13:11–14).

2. Light vs. Darkness and the Relational Test (2:9–11)

- a. Claiming to be in the light while hating a brother means remaining in spiritual darkness and blindness.
- b. Loving a fellow believer leads to abiding in the light without cause for stumbling.
- c. Hatred encompasses active malice as well as apathy, neutrality, or unconcern toward a neighbor in need.
- d. Practical illustration: Helping a neighbor clear a downed tree after a storm as an embodiment of active love.

B. Pastoral Appeal in View of the Message (2:12–17)

1. Commendation of Representative Stages of Spiritual Growth (2:12–14)

- a. Little children: Forgiveness of sins on account of His name; personal knowledge of the Father.
- b. Fathers: Deep, experiential knowledge of Him who is from the beginning.
- c. Young men: Strong in the abiding word of God, having overcome the evil one.

2. The Pre-Command: Warning Against Loving the World (2:15–16)

- a. Devotion to God is expulsive; setting ultimate affection on the world excludes the love of the Father.
- b. Three toxic worldly pursuits: Desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and pride of life (bios / vainglory of material existence).

3. The Transitory World vs. Doing God's Will (2:17)

- a. The world and its fleeting desires are passing away.
- b. The one who does the will of God abides forever, producing work that survives divine testing (cf. 1 Corinthians 3).

II. Section 3: Key Counsel — Remaining in His Anointing (1 John 2:18–3:8)

A. Considerations Informing the Counsel to Abide (2:18–21)

1. The Crisis of the Last Hour and Church Division (2:18–19)

- a. Arrival of many antichrists signals the reality of the last hour.
- b. Departure of deceivers from the community demonstrates they were not truly of the fellowship.

2. The Anointing of Believers (2:20–21)

- a. All believers possess spiritual knowledge through the anointing of the Holy One.
- b. The truth of the apostolic message is strictly exclusive of lies and deception.

B. The Truth That Abides (2:22–25)

1. Christological Test: Denying vs. Confessing the Son (2:22–23)

- a. The liar and antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, forfeiting fellowship with the Father.
- b. Confessing the Son secures an ongoing relationship with the Father.

2. Imperative and Motivation (2:24–25)

- a. Let what was heard from the beginning abide to ensure abiding in the Son and the Father.
- b. The promise of abiding: Eternal life.

C. The Imperative to Abide in the Anointing (2:26–29)

1. Protection Against Deceivers (2:26–27)

- a. Warning against those attempting to lead the congregation astray.
- b. The anointing (the Gospel word mediated by the Holy Spirit) teaches believers and frees them from reliance on false teachers.

2. Readiness for Christ's Return and Practice of Righteousness (2:28–29)

- a. Abiding yields confidence and prevents shrinking away in shame at His coming.
- b. Practicing righteousness serves as the clear mark of being born of God.

D. The Glory, Fruit, and Hope of Abiding (3:1–8)

1. The Father's Love and Present/Future Status (3:1–3)

- a. Marveling at the Father's lavish love in granting believers the status of God's children.
- b. Future hope: Being transformed into His likeness upon seeing Him as He is at His appearing.
- c. Hope drives self-purification in alignment with Christ's purity.

2. Freedom from Sin vs. Practice of Lawlessness (3:4–8)

- a. Sin defined as lawlessness; Christ appeared to take away sins and destroy the works of the devil.
- b. Distinguishing continuous, deliberate practice of sin (devilish origin) from righteous living born of God.
- c. Pastoral distinction between temporary sins requiring confession/restoration and total departure into heresy, antinomianism, or hard-heartedness.