

# **Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles**

## **Session 2A, Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John,**

### **6-min. Video Overview**

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Alright, today we're going to dig into the ancient letters of the Apostle John, and what we're going to find is a message that is, frankly, shockingly relevant, whether your faith is costing you absolutely everything or, well, costing you nothing at all. So this is the big question right here. It really frames our entire explainer.

You've got these two completely different worlds, two vastly different realities. And as we're about to see, the Apostle John somehow manages to speak directly and powerfully to both of them at the same time. And let me be clear, this question isn't just some academic thought experiment.

The source material for this actually shows that it came from a modern-day church facing intense persecution. I mean, they were studying John's letters online because it was just too dangerous to meet in person. They needed to know what these ancient words meant for them, right now, in their situation.

So here's the key. John is basically a master at writing in stereo. On one channel, you have people facing the absolute worst, making the ultimate sacrifice.

For them, his letter is this incredible encouragement, a call to courage. But on the other channel, he's talking to people living in total comfort with what you might call a bloodless religion that doesn't really ask much of them. And for that group, his words are a massive wake-up call, a sharp warning.

That tension, that's central to everything he's about to say. But okay, you might be wondering, why should we listen to John on this? What gives him the authority to speak to such extremes? Well, the thing is, his understanding wasn't theoretical. He wasn't some armchair philosopher.

It was forged in his own incredibly traumatic personal experiences. Just let's walk through this for a second. John was there.

He watched the crucifixion happen. He was present at Jesus's violent arrest. He himself was arrested, locked up, and beaten.

He had to watch his own brother James be executed with a sword. Then his co-pastor was murdered. And to top it all off, he lived through the absolute horror of the Roman siege and the complete destruction of his city.

This isn't abstract stuff. It's a resume of survival. And you know, there's this modern idea that really hits at home.

Trauma isn't just a bad memory. It's something you carry with you in your body. John's words are coming from a man who knew, intimately, what the cost of faith and the reality of violence felt like.

And that, that gives his message an incredible weight, an authenticity you just can't fake. So we've established who John is. Now, how do we get to the heart of what this traumatized, faithful apostle is really trying to say? Well, there's actually a pretty cool and straightforward way to decode his message for these two very different groups.

It's a method called word frequency. And the logic behind it is super simple, right? The things you say over and over and over again, well, those are the things that are really on your mind. They reveal what you're most concerned about.

By looking at John's most used words, we can basically see his blueprint. All right, let's put this to the test. We're going to look at some of John's greatest hits, so to speak, and see exactly how each one carries that dual message, one for the people who are suffering and one for the people who are comfortable.

So what's word number one? No surprise here. It's God. 62 times in his first letter alone.

That tells you everything. For John, this is the anchor. Everything he has to say starts and ends right here.

And right away, we see that message split. For those who are literally dying for their faith, the message is a powerful promise of victory. The eternal God you serve will defeat evil.

But for the comfortable crew with the bloodless religion, the message is blunt. Talk is cheap. If you say you know God but you don't actually obey his commands, then your words are just empty.

And yeah, John does not pull any punches. He puts it this plainly. It doesn't get much clearer than that, does it? For him, genuine faith is proven by what you do, not by what you say.

It's about walking the walk. Okay, let's move on to the next big one. And it's huge.

It's the word love. He uses the verb to love 28 times in that first letter. That's no accident.

This is absolutely central to his entire worldview. And once again, boom, you see the two-sided coin. For the persecuted, loving each other is the real tangible proof of eternal life.

It's what keeps them together. It's how they survive. But for the comfortable, the absence of that love is a massive red flag.

He's saying, hey, if you're lukewarm or you just don't care about others, you might need to seriously check if your faith is the real deal. I mean, just look at this single verse. It's incredible how it perfectly captures both sides.

It's like a warm hug of assurance for the people who are actively loving each other in the face of danger. And it's a chilling cold splash of water for those who aren't. It's both a comfort and a confrontation all in one sentence.

So when you pull this all together, what do you get? Well, you realize John's letters aren't some dusty museum piece. They are alive, and they present a timeless challenge that speaks right into our world today. The wisdom here is just so powerful.

So what are the takeaways? One, faith is a verb. It's something you do. Two, loving other people is the ultimate test of your faith.

Three, true faith is going to cost you something. It demands your whole life. And four, and this might be the biggest one for a lot of us, being comfortable can be a really serious spiritual danger.

And so that just leaves us with this one final unavoidable question. John's letters are reaching across 2000 years, looking right at us and forcing us to ask ourselves: is my faith costly, or is it just comfortable?