

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles

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

6-min. Video Overview

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You know, when you read 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, it's easy to see these incredible statements about God and love, but what if I told you they're not just nice, feel-good sayings? They're actually this sharp, powerful message. And here's the kicker. It was written for two totally different groups of people.

And once you see that, it changes- well, it changes everything about how you read them. So let me ask you something. Just think about it for a sec.

How does your faith feel when you're under extreme pressure versus when everything's, you know, comfortable and easy? Are they the same? Because that's the exact tension John is diving into here. It's the frame for this entire conversation. Okay, so to really get these letters, we have to know who he was talking to.

See, John wasn't just writing into the void. He had two very specific audiences in mind, and their experiences with faith, well, they were polar opposites. All right, so on one side, you've got this group we're calling the faithful dying.

I mean, these are people whose faith in Christ could literally cost them their lives. Everything is on the line. But then you've got the other group, the lax.

These are folks who, sure, they call themselves Christians, but their religion is just comfortable. It's bloodless. It hasn't cost them a thing.

So John's message, it's like a double-edged sword, right? For one group, it's this incredible comfort. For the other, it's a wake-up call, a serious warning. So let's get into the first big theme he tackles.

It's this idea of abiding. And this isn't just a random word. It's the main tool he uses to check the spiritual pulse of both these groups.

The word you've got to know is the Greek verb *meno*. Now, this isn't just about existing or being somewhere. It's so much deeper.

It means to remain, to endure, to stay completely and vitally connected. You know, like a branch on a vine? If it gets disconnected, it's done for. That's the picture John wants us to have.

And believe me, John is not subtle about this. He uses *meno*, this word for abide, 24 times in 1 John alone. 24.

When you see a word repeated that many times, you know it's the absolute bullseye of his message. So, okay, what does it actually mean to abide? Well, John lays it out pretty clearly. It's an active process, not passive.

It all starts when you hear that original message, the gospel. But it's not a one-and-done thing. The key is to let that message sink in, to let it remain in you.

And what happens then? You get to remain, to abide in this real, living connection with the Father and the Son. And this is where it gets really fascinating, because this one idea of abiding lands so differently for each group. For the faithful dying, the message is pure comfort.

It's like John is saying, hey, that truth you're holding onto, the one that's causing you so much trouble, that's your lifeline. That's what's keeping you connected to God. But for the lax, it's a huge red flag.

It's a warning shot. If you start drifting from that core teaching, you're not just drifting from an idea. You're disconnecting from God Himself.

So for the ones who are really suffering for their faith, this promise here is everything. Think about it. The very thing the world is punishing them for is the very thing that guarantees their connection to God.

Wow. But then, boom. Here's the other side of the coin for the comfortable crowd.

See that phrase, goes on ahead? That's talking about people who think they're too sophisticated for the simple gospel, that they've evolved past it. And John's response couldn't be more blunt. You do that, you abandon the teaching of Christ, you don't have God, full stop.

Okay, so that idea of abiding or departing leads us right into John's next big point. And it's all about this massive conflict between two different worlds and this choice we all have to make about where we truly belong. The Greek word he uses is kosmos.

Now, we hear cosmos, and we think stars and planets, right? But for John, kosmos is something else entirely. It's the whole human system, our values, our ambitions, our desires, that's set up and running in opposition to God. And once again, you see this two-sided message just pop.

To the group that's suffering, he's basically saying, look, of course the world hates you. Don't let it throw you. This whole system is temporary; it's fading.

Your hope is locked into something that lasts forever. But to the comfortable folks, the warning is different. It's, hey, watch out.

This world is filled with shiny, religious-looking things that aren't the real deal. Test everything. Don't fall for the fakes.

So for anyone who feels crushed by the world, this is a game changer. That big, scary world that feels so permanent, John says it's passing away, along with all its desires. But the one who does God's will, that person is the one who's going to abide forever.

All right, all of this, abiding in your relationship to the world, it's all building to John's final and honestly most crucial point. It all boils down to one single, absolute litmus test. And that is, what do you do with the Son, Jesus Christ? I mean, check this out.

In just these few short letters, he calls Jesus the Son 22 times. That's no accident. John is pounding the table on this.

He's making it crystal clear that everything about your faith stands or falls on who you say the Son is. So let's bring it back to our two groups. For the believer who's literally facing death, faith in the Son is their rock.

It's the absolute guarantee of eternal life. But for the lax, the comfortable ones, the warning here is razor sharp. True, saving faith isn't just a vague belief in God or trying to be a moral person.

No way. It's an active, out loud, ongoing confession of the Son. If you don't have that, you don't have it.

And here's the comfort, the deep assurance for those whose lives are on the line. Real life, eternal life, it's not something you work for. It's not a prize you win.

It's a gift. And the gift is in the Son. The logic is simple.

If you have the Son, you have the life. And then here comes the knockout punch for the lax. John does not pull any punches here.

He says, "Who's the real liar? It's the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ. To water him down to just a good teacher or a role model, John says, that's not just wrong; it's the very spirit of antichrist. Why? Because when you deny the Son, you're actually denying the Father who sent him.

So, okay, thousands of years later, why should we care? What does this have to do with us? Well, it's because John's message to these two groups is like a mirror, a mirror held up to our own faith right here, right now. When you really boil it down, John lays out these two paths, these unavoidable choices. Are you going to abide in the teaching of Christ, or are you going to depart from it? Are you going to endure the world's opposition, or are you going to fall in love with its values? And ultimately, are you going to actively confess the Son, or are you going to deny who he truly is? So the big takeaway, the thing we have to wrestle with, is this.

These letters aren't just ancient history. They force us to ask a really tough question. Which audience am I in? Am I the one holding on for dear life, or am I the one who's just kind of comfortably drifting? John's holding up that mirror, and he's asking us to take a hard look at what our faith is really made of and what it really costs us.

And that leaves us with one last thing to think about. In our world today, a world that pretty much worships comfort and fitting in, which of John's two paths is the bigger challenge for us? Which one is the greater danger? Is it the path of the faithful who are suffering, or is it the path of the comfortable and lax?