

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles, Session 2B, Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John Audio Overview Podcast from NotebookLM

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Welcome back to the Deep Dive. We're jumping straight in today. We are, and this topic actually comes from you, our listener.

That's right. You shared a really fascinating source. It's a lecture by Dr. Robert Yarbrough.

It's called Balancing Life in Christ, and it looks at the theological themes in 1, 2, and 3 John. Yes, the Johannine Epistles. And our goal here, really, is to walk you through the main insights from these letters.

Dr. Yarbrough takes this interesting approach. He looks at the words John uses most often, and he shows how these words, these key concepts, actually carry different weight, different messages, for two distinct groups he identifies in John's audience. Right.

He talks about the faithful dying. Those facing really intense pressure, maybe even martyrdom. And then the lax, the ones who are maybe compromising or just drifting away spiritually.

Exactly. So it's about how these timeless ideas speak to those two very different, almost opposite pressures. So it's really a deep dive into that central challenge.

Dr. Yarbrough names balancing life in Christ, using the words themselves as the guide. Let's get into it. Okay.

So Dr. Yarbrough kicks things off by pointing out the top three most frequent words. No big surprise here. God loves specifically the verb to love and knowing.

And you mentioned knowing is interesting. There are like two different Greek words John uses. That's right.

There's *ginoskw*, which is more about experiential knowledge, like knowing someone through a relationship. And then there's *oida*, which we'll get to later. That's more about sort of clear conviction or intellectual certainty.

Gotcha. That distinction seems important. It really is.

But to get at the heart of John's message for these two groups, the faithful and the lax, Dr. Yarbrough actually looks beyond those top three. He digs into the next most frequent words. Okay.

So we're stepping past God, love, and that *ginoskw*, knowing. What's number four on the list? Number four is the word *meno*. It means to remain or to abide.

Mino. Abide. Okay.

Yeah. And its significance shows up about two dozen times in 1 John, three more times in 2 John. Clearly a major theme for John.

So abide. How does this speak to the first group, the faithful dying? Well, for them, John's message is that God's word, the message they first heard and believed, it isn't just static information. It's dynamic.

It's what saved them. And it actually imparts God's living presence within them. Huh.

His living presence. Exactly. And this living word, this divine indwelling, it keeps believers anchored.

It keeps them close to the Son and the Father, no matter what's happening externally. Dr. Yarbrough points straight to 1 John 2.24. Which says that? Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. Then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Wow. So the very thing that might be causing them trouble- holding onto that original message about Jesus- is also the source of their connection and security with God. Precisely.

It's like God comes through the word. When you open yourself to that foundational truth, you're united with God. So for someone facing persecution, maybe even death, the message is incredibly hopeful.

The word that makes you stand out, the word that might be causing friction with the world, that's the very same word that guarantees your unbreakable union with God himself. It's a kind of mystical connection, almost, but rooted in that word. Yes.

Enabled by God's Spirit. It gives them hope, assurance, even when the world is hostile. Okay.

So for those under pressure, abiding is about that deep, secure connection. What does abiding mean for the other group, for the lacking? For them, it's more of a warning. If someone is departing from the clear, basic teaching about Christ, especially the core truths about who he is, well, that signals a really serious problem.

It suggests a lack of a genuine saving relationship. A lack of the real thing. Right.

John is super direct in C.N. John line. He says, everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. But then he adds, whoever abides in the teaching is both the father and the son.

Goes on ahead. What does that mean? Like things that are past the basics. That seems to be the idea Dr. Yarbrough suggests.

Moving beyond, or maybe thinking you've evolved past, the essential original message about Jesus Christ. And he stresses, abiding isn't easy. It's central, but it's challenging for all of us, really.

The natural pull, that sort of spiritual gravity, is towards being lax, towards complacency, maybe mediocrity. The path of least resistance. Exactly.

So abiding means actively, consciously sticking with the beginning: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, faith in him. And then walking that out, developing that relationship. If you try to go on ahead to leave that core behind, John's verdict is stark.

You just don't have God, no matter what you might say. So it's security and suffering for the faithful, but a test of reality for the lax. That's a sharp contrast.

What's the next word on Dr. Yarbrough's list? Moving down, number five is cosmos, the world. The world. Comes up 23 times just in First John, you said.

Yeah, it's a big one. So how does the concept of the world speak to the faithful dying? Well, for them, the cosmos, the world system, it can feel absolutely overwhelming, like it's the only reality. Permanent, powerful, often incredibly cruel.

Dr. Yarbrough mentioned those examples, like Christians in places like Sudan facing just immense hardship, no food, no water, no jobs, no education, unless they renounce their faith. In that situation, the world feels like everything, the ultimate power. It really does.

But John gives this radical counter perspective. He says, essentially, look, this world, it's passing away. It's temporary.

The ones who align themselves with God's unchanging will, they're the ones who find real life in his unchanging presence. And because the world is passing away, you should actually expect friction. Expect antagonism if your ultimate allegiance is to God's will, not to, you know, human goals or worldly success.

It gets to First John 3.13, doesn't it? Do not be surprised that the world hates you. Exactly. And First John 2.1 Summon adds that the world is passing away along with its desires.

Its desires. Yeah. And Dr. Yarbrough made a point about desires.

Often we jump to sexual desire, and he even threw in that statistic about, you know, what gets searched most online. But it's broader than that. It's the whole range of cravings and ambitions driven by the world system.

The point is, the world and everything it values, it's all temporary, fading. But in contrast, the person who does the will of God abides forever. So knowing Christ changes your whole orientation.

You're living in this world, but aligned with another reality. You're living in, as he put it, two worlds at once, navigating the physical but oriented toward and already participating in the kingdom of God. OK.

And how does this world theme apply to the lax? What's the danger for them? For the lax, the danger isn't just persecution from the world. It's also seduction by the world. The world is full of counterfeit spiritualities, religious substitutes, misrepresentations of the truth—these false spirits, these prophets that John warns about.

They get a lot of airtime in the world. They're popular, like checking what's trending online, maybe. Exactly.

Think about it. First John 4.1 is a clear warning. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Why? Because they come from the world. So the world listens to them. That's First John 4.5, precisely.

People whose core beliefs aren't rooted in God's actual word speak from the world's perspective, and the world loves it. It resonates. But God's people, they've heard his word.

And hearing that word changes everything, changes their position relative to the world system. So the letters are just saturated with this theme of conflicting worlds, conflicting loyalties. So the world is a harsh storm for the faithful, but maybe a tempting illusion for the lax.

Different threats from the same cosmos. Okay, what's the sixth word? Number six is Son, capital S. Appears 22 times, always referring to Jesus. It's John's main way of talking about Jesus or Christ in these letters.

The absolute center. Okay, what's the message of the Son for the faithful dying? For them, believing in the Son brings this absolute rock-solid assurance of eternal life. Because, as First John 5.20 puts it, the Son is the true God and eternal life.

He is eternal life. Yes. And Dr. Yarbrough really emphasized this isn't just about the future, about life after death, although it includes that, of course.

Eternal life is also a present reality. It's a different quality of life you experience now because of Christ's presence in you. It's like a down payment, a foretaste.

So not just hoping for heaven, but actually experiencing some of that life now, even amidst difficulty. Exactly. First John 5, verses 11 to 13 make that clear.

God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. John says he's writing so that you may know that you have eternal life. It's something you possess right now.

And then verse 20 is just profound. We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding. And Dr. Yarbrough noted this isn't just like basic knowledge.

It's deep insight so that we may know him who is true in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. So for someone facing death, the ultimate question is life.

And the Son is the one who embodies it, gives it, guarantees it, and connects you to God. That is incredibly grounding when facing mortality. What about the Son's message for the lax? For the lax, it's another stark message.

Real saving faith. It's not just ticking a box, like intellectually agreeing with some ideas about God. And it's not just trying to follow a moral code.

Dr. Yarbrough quipped, "You know, nobody keeps the Ten Commandments perfectly anyway. And the standard isn't just being better than the next person. Saving faith requires centering on Jesus, the Son, as the defining ultimate revelation of God.

So rejecting him or being indifferent to him or even hostile towards who he truly is- that's the critical failure point. It really comes down to Jesus specifically. Absolutely.

Look at 1 John 2.23. It pulls no punches. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. And then the crucial part: no one who denies the Son has the Father.

Denying the Son. That's not just like questioning historical facts. No, it's denying Jesus in his fullness: who he is, what he came to do, especially the cross, and who he is now at God's right hand, interceding.

But the positive side is just as important. Confessing the Son means you genuinely have the Father. You mentioned Dr. Yarbrough shared an anecdote here.

Yeah, it was memorable: a man who apparently had this gift of healing and was all about God's love and miracles. But when the conversation turned to 1 Peter 3.18, Christ died for sins to bring us to God, the man became openly hostile. Because acknowledging Christ dying for sins meant acknowledging sin and his own need for what the Son did.

That seemed to be the issue. His faith bypassed the Son's essential atoning work. And John's point is that's not negotiable.

If you deny the Son in that way, you don't have the Father. You end up in darkness and danger, not the light and goodness of God. Which leads us naturally to love a gay pay.

Number seven, right? Though you said it was one of the top three overall. Right. It's incredibly frequent.

But Dr. Yarbrough discusses it here in this sequence. 18 occurrences just in 1 John. He calls it a characteristic attribute of God.

OK, so for the faithful dying, how does God's love function? For them, God's love is presented as this ultimate refuge. It lifts them above that deep, almost universal human fear, the fear of judgment. Dr. Yarbrough brought up that powerful example of, like, Pilate's last words in a crash, often crying out, Oh, God, there's this innate sense of accountability, of facing judgment.

Yeah, it's sobering. It is. But for the believer, knowing the Son brings you into relationship with God, who is love.

And this love, as John says, it's perfected or completed in us. It actually casts out that fear, specifically the fear of God's judgment. 1 John 4.16 is key here.

Read that one. We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him.

By this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. And then this line, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There's no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

As he is, so also are we in this world. That speaks again to that union, that connection. It really does.

It's about being united with God through the Son, abiding in his love. For those facing persecution, this is vital. Dr. Yarborough was careful here that suffering isn't God's judgment on them, but because of God's love perfected in them, they don't need to fear his ultimate judgment day.

He mentioned seeing testimonies, maybe on sites like Voice of the Martyrs, where persecuted Christians, despite horrific trauma, show this incredible sense of God's love and peace. So love is like a shield against that ultimate fear for the faithful. Yeah.

How does John use love to address the lax? For the lax, the warning is sharp. Your soul is compromised, even if you say you're a believer. If your ultimate love, your primary allegiance, is directed toward anything other than God the Father, or more than God the Father who sent the Son, it really echoes the first commandment, right? No other gods.

And 1 John 2.15 is incredibly blunt. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Okay, wait. Help me square that with John 3.16. Yeah. God so loved the world.

That sounds like a contradiction. That's a really important question, and Dr. Yarbrough tackled it. He described 1 John 2.15 as this black-and-white statement.

It needs to be balanced by John 3.16. The issue isn't having zero affection for creation or people or things in the world. That's not it. Okay.

The issue is where your ultimate affection lies, your primary loyalty, your treasure, your source of identity and security. If you set that ultimate affection on the world and its system and its values in a way that competes with or replaces your love for God the Father, then, John says, the love of the Father isn't in you. You aren't expressing love for the Father in that ultimate sense.

Ah, okay. So it's about the priority of love, the ultimate direction of your heart, not about enjoying a sunset. Exactly.

That distinction is crucial. Makes sense. Okay, let's shift to the theme of sin.

Number eight. Seventh, actually, on his list here, I think. Sin, 17 times in 1 John.

Okay, sin. For the faithful dying, what's the message? The message is hope. They can face death with hope precisely because they know their sins are forgiven.

God's love, his agape love, was shown most clearly when he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation means he took the punishment, satisfying God's justice against sin. Exactly.

Jesus bore the wrath we deserved. 1 John 4.10 says, In this is love. He loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And even in their suffering, John reminds them that fellowship with other believers is a source of strength. 1 John 1.7 links walking in the light, fellowship, and the blood of Jesus, cleansing us from all sin. So their hope isn't in being sinless, but in God having dealt with their sin through the Son.

Precisely. Forgiveness is secured. And the warning about sin for the lax.

The warning is against basically taking grace for granted. Sinning deliberately, maybe habitually, thinking, Oh, well, forgiveness is always there. So it doesn't really matter.

John pushes back hard. He says, Jesus appeared specifically to take away sins, to reduce sin in our lives, not to give us a license for ongoing rebellion. Look at 1 John 3: 4 and 5. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

Sin is lawlessness. And then he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. Lawlessness.

Anomia. Did Dr. Yarbrough define that more? He suggested it likely points to something more than just accidental stumbling, which, you know, James and Paul admit happens even to believers. Anomia here seems to suggest a more dedicated, willful rebellion against God's ways.

A pattern of disregarding his commands. So John's warning is against playing this dangerous game, as Dr. Yarbrough put it, like a game of chicken with God. Yeah, climbing, you believe, but living in intentional, ongoing sin, assuming God's grace just covers it endlessly.

John is saying that kind of belief isn't real saving faith. It doesn't connect you to the Son who came to destroy the works of the devil, including sin. It's about the overall direction, the pattern of life, not just isolated failures.

Okay. Now back to knowing. We talked about Janoska experiential knowing.

How about the other one? Oida. Ah yes, Oida. Ninth most frequent word here, 14 times.

And as we touched on, this kind of knowing is about having a clear conception, a firm conviction, and settled certainty about something. Okay. So what specific conviction, what Oida knowledge does John emphasize for the faithful dying? For them, it's the ultimate Christian hope.

The absolute certainty, Oida, of the Lord's return and the promise that when he appears, they will see him in his full glory and be transformed. This unwavering expectation is what holds them up through trials, loss, even facing death. Okay.

First John 3.2 uses Oida beautifully. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know Oida that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. So they can be completely sure about that future reality, seeing God unveiled.

Yes, a firm conviction about that transformation and seeing him face to face, not dimly as we do now. And Dr. Yarbrough pointed out how John calls them beloved right there, reinforcing their secure identity as God's children, which grounds this hope. This Oida conviction is a powerful anchor.

And for the lax, what's the key Oida conviction John wants them to grasp? For the lax, a crucial sign, something they should know with certainty, Oida, if Christ is truly in them, is the presence of active, self-giving love for fellow believers. If that love is missing, it's a strong indication they haven't actually passed from spiritual death into life in Christ. Wow.

First John 3.14 states it plainly. We know Oida that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. So love for other Christians isn't just like a nice optional extra.

It's actual evidence, something you can know for sure that confirms your faith is real. Exactly. This conviction Oida comes from seeing God's love actually working itself out visibly among believers.

Dr. Yarbrough mentioned how looking back over time, seeing that love in action provides concrete assurance. And the flip side later in verse 14 is just as stark. Whoever does not love abides in death.

If you lack this love, you lack this Oida knowledge; you haven't passed into life; you don't truly know God. That makes love a really practical test. Okay, next theme: hearing.

Akush, the verb I hear, 14 times. Yes, and for the faithful dying, Akush brings immense comfort. It means God hears them when they cry out, especially in danger, in need, in the fear of death.

They have his ear. They have his attention. Yes, 1 John 5.14, Sastre 15 gives this confidence.

This is the confidence we have towards him that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And then, if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have requests that we have asked of him. Now, obviously God hears everything in one sense, but this is more like he's actively listening, intending to act.

Exactly, attentive hearing. And that phrase, according to his will, is absolutely key. Dr. Yarbrough connected it to the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done."

The confidence isn't that we get whatever we want, but that if we are asking in alignment with his purpose, because he hears us, we can be sure we have what we've asked for because it aligns with his best plan. So prayer genuinely matters. It's not manipulating God, but knowing he takes our cries seriously.

Right, and sometimes he teaches us through delay or by shaping our desires through the process of asking, but the confidence is that he hears. Okay, so for the faithful, hearing

means confident access in prayer. What's the hearing message for the lax? For the lax, the emphasis connects back to what they heard initially.

It highlights that loving God and obeying his commands go hand in hand. They aren't opposites. It's a big mistake to think, oh, God is loving, so he doesn't really care about obedience or ethical standards.

Don't separate love and obedience. Exactly, 2 John 6 makes this link explicit. This is love: that we walk according to his commandments.

And then it adds this reminder. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. What you heard back then, the foundation includes living according to his commands.

Which leads perfectly to the next word: commandment and delay. Also 14 times. What's the angle for the faithful dying here? For them, the reality is that keeping God's commandments is often the very reason they're suffering.

Being faithful leads to abuse, arrest, and social exclusion. But John points them to the core commandment. Believe in Jesus Christ and love one another.

That's the essence. Yes, and he assures them that when you keep these commands, especially loving one another, you abide in God, and God abides in you. 1 John 3.23-24 says it.

This is the commandment that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him. And he adds, we know this connection is real because of the Holy Spirit he's given us.

It's deep reassurance for those paying a price. So keeping commands, focused on belief and love, is the way to experience God's presence, even when it costs you. Yeah.

And for the lax, the message about commandments. For the lax, the message is that genuine faith naturally produces an appetite for God's commands. You actually want to learn and do what he asks because you see his commands as expressions of his love and wisdom.

Dr. Yarbrough made the point that as you grow, his commands are not burdensome. Not heavy or oppressive. Right.

So if they do feel burdensome, if you find yourself resisting them or ignoring them, that's a warning sign. It might mean your faith is weak or maybe not genuine at all. 1 John 2.4 is incredibly blunt.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar. And the truth is not in him. Wow.

A liar. Yeah. And 1 John 5.3 connects it directly to love.

This is the love of God: that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. So being indifferent to commands or trying to pit love against obedience, that's a serious problem in John's view. God's guidance is part of who he is.

Okay. Last word on this list. Father, preacher, 14 times, mostly for God the Father, message for the faithful dying.

For them, John zooms in on the sheer wonder, the incredible magnitude of the Father's love that made them his children. Think of 1 John 3.1, see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God. And so we are.

This identity as dearly loved children gives them steadfastness, assurance of his care, and his protection for their souls. And it explains their conflict with the world. Exactly.

The verse continues. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him, the Father. Their alienation from the world makes sense because the world is alienated from the Father they now belong to.

So the world's hostility isn't random. It's because they bear the father's family resemblance and the world doesn't know him. Precisely.

It helps them understand the opposition. And finally, for the lax, the message concerns the father. For the lax, it circles back to that fundamental choice we talked about with love and the world.

The love of the Father and love for the Father is the absolute opposite of loving the world. You can't have both as your ultimate allegiance. It's one or the other.

Yes. Having the Father means confessing the Son as Lord, treasuring him above the world. Anything less isn't truly having the Father, and loving the world too much, prioritizing its desires and values, cuts you off from experiencing the Father's love.

Dr. Yarbrough brought back those verses from First John 2.15-17 as a kind of final powerful warning here. Remind us of those again. Do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

That really does tie together so many of the warnings for the lax worldliness, love, not having the Father if you deny the Son. It's a strong finish to that section. A very strong conclusion, yes.

Yeah. A direct challenge. Okay.

That was quite a journey through those keywords guided by Dr. Yarbrough's lecture. Abide, world, son, love, sin, no, oida, healing, commandment, and father. And seeing how each one speaks differently, sometimes sharply differently, to the faithful dying and the lax.

It really does eliminate that whole challenge of balancing life in Christ that 1, 2, and 3 John address. It really does, doesn't it? It shows this constant dynamic John sees. How do you navigate the pressures of this world while remaining rooted, abiding in God? How do you expect antagonism from the world, but still find refuge in God's love? Yeah.

And recognizing that real life, real forgiveness, only comes through the Son. And that true faith isn't just mental assent. It shows up in love for others, in obedience.

And understanding our identity fundamentally as children of the Father, which sets us apart from a world that doesn't know him. All these themes are woven together. It makes these letters feel incredibly relevant.

The pressures might look different today, maybe less often fatal for many of us listening. But the internal pressures, the temptation to drift, to compromise, that's timeless. It's this ongoing call to stay grounded, be authentic, live it out.

It is. And thinking about the big picture John paints, he consistently uses these stark contrasts, doesn't he? Between the faithful and the lax. Between having the father and son and not having them.

Between loving God and loving the world, life and death. Which really brings us to a final thought, something for you, the listener, to maybe mull over after this deep dive. Given these sharp contrasts John lays out, where do you see yourself fitting in that picture? What does reflecting on that reveal about the specific ways you need to pursue that balancing act of life in Christ right now? That's a really crucial question to end on.

It is. Well, thank you so much for guiding us through this material. It was incredibly rich, drawing on that source you shared with us.

Glad we could explore it together.