

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles

Session 4, 2 John: Notes to a Trusted Church,

6-min. Video Overview

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You know, it's pretty wild to think that a tiny 2,000-year-old letter could have anything to say about our lives today. But we're going to look at one, to John, that tackles a problem so relevant it feels like it could have been written last week. I mean, just think about it: How do you build a community that's super welcoming to everyone but, at the same time, protects itself from really dangerous ideas? It's a total tightrope walk, and it's one this ancient letter takes on head-on. And here's the thing: this little letter doesn't just ask the question. It actually gives us a practical framework for how to think about it. So today we're going to unpack that framework and see how it might just help us navigate these same challenges. To do this. We're going to lean on a really simple but super powerful tool from a biblical scholar named.

Dr. Robert Yarbrough. His work really helps unlock what's going on in this ancient text. He calls it the see then say method. It's exactly what it sounds like a two-step process. First you have to see you have to look at what was happening then and there you know in the original world of the Letter and only after you've done that work can you start to responsibly say what it might mean for us in the here and now as Dr. Yarbrough puts it we need to see what was then and there before we start saying what it means. That's a simple rule, but man, it's so easy to forget, isn't it? We all jump to conclusions without knowing the full story. So let's do step one.

Let's see. Okay, so let's fire up the time machine and head back to the first century. Who exactly were these people? What was the glue that held their entire community together? So the letter starts by addressing an elect lady and her children; now, scholars are pretty sure this isn't a literal mom and her kids. It's actually this beautiful, poetic way of talking about a local church: the lady and its members, her children. So right off the bat, you know, this is a deeply personal message for a very close-knit group, and the bond this community had was something. Dr. Yarbrough calls it ecclesial solidarity. This was way more than just being friendly neighbors. It was this powerful sense of oneness that just blew past all the usual social barriers of the day. You know, rich, poor, different backgrounds, all united as one. So what was the source of that incredible unity? Well, the text spells it out for us. The author says he loves them because of the truth that abides in us. Their whole community wasn't built on shared hobbies or political views.

Nope. It was forged in this shared foundational truth, but there's always a but. Right, this tight-knit community was facing a really serious threat, and it was coming from the inside. The author isn't just writing a friendly note. He's sounding an alarm, and this is where you really feel the tension in the letter. On one hand, he's thrilled that some of them are walking in the truth. That's the good news, but then he drops this warning: many deceivers have gone out into the world. The danger wasn't some far-off threat. It was literally knocking on their door. The standard they were supposed to hold on to was the teaching of Christ. You

can think of it like a big old tree with super deep roots. You know, the wind can blow, seasons can change, but that tree stays put. That's the idea behind abiding. Staying grounded in something stable and life-giving now. This part is just fascinating. The word for deceiver in the original Greek is actually related to our word planet. Isn't that wild? See for the ancients the stars were these fixed reliable points of light, but the planets they were the wanderers in the sky.

So a deceiver is someone who's unmoored, unstable, just drifting around without any fixed point, and this slide just lays it out. So clearly, look at the contrast on one side. You've got the teaching of Christ stable, rooted, unifying, bringing people together. And on the other, the deceiver wandering, unstable, divisive, tearing things apart. It's such a powerful visual of the choice they were facing. Okay, so we've seen this situation: a community built on truth facing this dangerous, wandering ideology. So now the big question: what does the letter say? What should they actually do about it? How do you fight back? And this is where we get that super practical three-part framework for walking the tightrope. It's all about living a balanced life. You need truth for the mind: what you believe. You need commandments for your actions how you actually live. And you need love from the heart, your whole attitude.

They have to work together. You can't just pick one. You need all three to stay standing, and that balanced approach leads us right to what is, without a doubt, the toughest instruction in the whole letter. The author says that if someone shows up promoting this wandering teaching, do not receive him to your house or give him any greeting. And yeah, let's just be real for a second. That sounds harsh, right? Does this seriously mean you have to shun friends and family who believe different things? That feels like the total opposite of love. This is exactly why that see-then-say method is so important. Dr. Yarbrough points out that this isn't about personal relationships at all. Back then, giving a traveling teacher a place to stay and a meal was basically a public endorsement. You were bankrolling their mission.

So the instruction isn't Don't be friends with people who disagree with you. It's Don't provide a platform, a missionary outpost, for people who are actively trying to destroy the foundation of your community. It's a huge difference. It's about who you platform, not who you love. So why go through all this trouble? Why walk this difficult tightrope of truth and love? Well, the letter makes the end goal crystal clear, and it's probably not what you'd guess. See the point isn't just to avoid being wrong. It's about something way bigger. The author's ultimate hope is that by wrestling with all this stuff together their joy may be complete. So all this hard work of discernment. It's actually the path to a deeper more solid and more real kind of joy and this whole idea of full joy. It isn't just some random phrase.

It's a direct echo of what Jesus himself says in the Gospel of John. He told his followers he was teaching them these difficult things specifically so their joy may be full. It's this amazing reminder that sometimes the path to real joy goes through our biggest challenges not around them. So when you step back this tiny ancient letter gives us this timeless framework. It reminds us that building a real strong community is messy. It takes this constant difficult, but ultimately joyful balancing act between love truth and wisdom. And that really leaves us with a question for right here right now in a world. It's just buzzing with voices and ideas. How do we do that? How do we practice that same difficult balance? How do we hold on to what's true while showing genuine love to everyone? That's the challenge, and maybe the invitation, that John leaves with us today.