

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles

Session 5, 1 John 1:1-2:6, Central Burden,

6-min. Video Overview

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You know, the book of 1 John can feel like a bit of a puzzle, right? On one hand, it's just overflowing with this message of love. But then on the other hand, it's also incredibly demanding about strict obedience and having the right beliefs. So which one is it? Well, today we're going to try to unravel that apparent contradiction and figure out what a full-scale faith really looks like.

And hey, the data really doesn't lie. Just look at this chart. It shows you exactly why people call John the apostle of love.

I mean, the sheer number of times he uses the word love in his writings just blows the other New Testament authors out of the water. It is, without a doubt, the very heart of his message. But you know, that intense focus on love is exactly what makes this so puzzling.

How can the same guy, the apostle of love, also be so, well, so demanding about what you believe and how you act? Is he contradicting himself? Or just maybe, is there a deeper harmony here that we're just not seeing at first glance? Okay, so the key to cracking this whole thing, I think, comes from a theologian named Dr. Robert Yarborough. He came up with this brilliant 3D model of faith. And what's so great about it is that it doesn't just get rid of the tension; it actually reveals this beautiful integrated picture of what it means to truly believe.

So our model starts with what we can call the X-axis. And this is all about belief. Think of it as the bedrock, the foundation of your faith, the core doctrines you say, yes, I affirm that.

It's the what you believe. You know, like the absolute foundational claim that Jesus is Lord. That's our starting point.

All right, next up, we add the Y-axis. Obedience. This is where belief has to become action.

It's the how you live your life, your ethics, your works, the whole shebang. Because for John, faith is never just a mental exercise. It has to be lived out, embodied, in your day-to-day.

Okay, so you might be thinking, belief plus obedience, that's got to be it, right? Well, not so fast. In this really sobering warning, Jesus talks about people who seem to have both. I mean, they call him Lord, that's belief, and they do mighty works, that's obedience.

But he still looks at them and says, I never knew you. Wow, that's a huge critical clue that there's still a piece of this puzzle missing. So what is that missing piece? If what you believe and what you do aren't the whole story, then what on earth is left? And this is it.

The final dimension is the Z-axis: relationship. This right here is the absolute heart of the matter. It's not just about what you believe or what you do, but who you know.

That phrase, I never knew you, that's not a critique of their doctrine or their deeds. It's a statement about a missing relationship. This is the dimension that breathes life into the other two.

All right, so with this 3D framework in our back pocket, let's turn back to 1 John and see how it just illuminates the central message of the whole book. You see, John's entire argument really hinges on this one single profound statement. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

And that's not just a nice metaphor. For John, this is the standard. It's the ultimate measuring stick for our belief, our obedience, and our relationships.

And this table here, it just breaks it down perfectly. See, walking in the light isn't some vague fuzzy feeling. It's the actual alignment of all three of those axes with God's character.

On the belief axis, it's acknowledging the truth. On the obedience axis, it's keeping his commandments. And on the relationship axis, it's having genuine fellowship with God and with others.

Anything less than that? Well, that's walking in darkness. Okay, so that's the model. But how does this actually translate into everyday life? I mean, what does it really look like for you and me to walk in the light? Well, John's challenge is incredibly direct.

I mean, it's uncompromising. He gives us this scenario. Someone says, I know him.

So they're claiming the relationship. Maybe they even have the right beliefs, but they don't keep his commandments. They're failing on that obedience axis.

And John's verdict? It's stark. He says that person is a liar. I mean, this is a perfect example of what happens when your faith gets flattened out.

The Y axis, obedience, is just gone. And without it, the whole structure is totally hollow. And all through this letter, John keeps drawing this sharp, clear line between these hollow claims and a truly authentic faith.

It's the huge difference between pretending you have no sin and actually confessing it. It's the massive gulf between walking in the darkness of just saying things and walking in the light of a real, fully integrated faith. So what's the end game here? What's the point of all this? Is it just to give us a checklist of rules to follow? No, not at all.

Far from it. John shows us that the goal of this whole journey, this move toward a full-scale faith, is something really, really profound. And he even gives us a clear roadmap.

Step one, walk in the light. That means getting all three of those axes, belief, obedience, and relationship, lined up with God's character. Two, confess your sins.

Be honest about where you fall short. Three, trust in Jesus as your advocate. And four, live like him.

Try to emulate his life of love and service. And the amazing thing is, the destination of this path isn't a life of heavy, burdensome rules. It's a life of complete joy.

It's that deep, profound peace and assurance that can only come from a faith that is whole, that's authentic across all three dimensions. And so that leaves us with a question that's, you know, both really simple and incredibly profound. What does a balanced, full-scale faith look like in practice, in your life, today? It's a question that's definitely worth asking because the answer, I think, gets you to the very heart of what it means to truly follow Jesus.