

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles, Session 5, Section 1, 1 John 1:1-2:6, Central Burden Audio Overview Podcast from NotebookLM

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Welcome back to the Deep Dive. Today, we're really getting into the First Epistle of John, specifically that first main chunk, Chapter 1, Verse 1 through Chapter 2, Verse 6. Yeah, and we're drawing heavily from Dr. Robert Yarbrough's work on the General Epistles. Session 5 is our guide here.

We've touched on the background before, looked at 2 John and 3 John. Right, the shorter letters. And now we're starting the detailed look at 1 John.

And, well, some think it might have been sent to the same churches, right? It's a common view, yeah. Yeah. There's likely a connection there.

Okay, so the big theme across these letters, as the source puts it, is balancing life in Christ. And for 1 John, it really zeroes in on full-scale faith, believing in God- Father, Son, Spirit. They're all right there in the text.

And something that just leaps off the page, especially when you see it visually, like in the source material, is the word love: agape and agapawl. Oh, yeah. How so? The sheer frequency.

I mean, compared to any other New Testament book, John's Gospel and 1 John are just off the charts. Like a skyscraper on a graph next to little bungalows. Exactly like that.

It's really striking. And it shows why he's called the Apostle of Love. It's not just a nice title.

It's based firmly in what he actually wrote. It's statistically significant love. You could say that, yeah.

It feels like the very air he breathes, spiritually speaking. So our mission for this deep dive, then? Well, we want to unpack what Yarbrough calls the central burden of this first section, 1.1 to 2.6. What's the core message? And, you know, what does it mean for you trying to live out this full-scale faith? Okay. Central burden.

Where do we start? Maybe with how the letter is structured. Yeah, that's helpful. We have our modern chapters and verses, of course, but they weren't there originally.

The Byzantine church actually had its own way of dividing 1 They broke it into seven sections, probably for reading in church services, like a lectionary. In this part, we're looking at 1.1 to 2.6. That's the first one. That's the one.

And they called it the central burden. Tells you it's pretty important foundational stuff. Right.

So what is it? What's the absolute core message John is hammering home right from the start? It's stated very clearly. John says this is the message he heard and now proclaims: God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God is light.

Simple words, but deep. What would that mean to someone hearing it back then? Well, think about the Roman world. Lots of gods, lots of religion focused on practical things.

Health, crops, success, appeasing the gods for earthly benefits. Not so much about morality or relationship? Generally, no. Not in the way John means.

So declaring God is light, that's a radical statement about God's very nature, his absolute holiness, his purity, his perfection, his complete otherness from the darkness and flaws we see in creation and ourselves. And you said it's not just his nature, but his activity. Yes.

Because God is light, it shapes everything. How he acts, how he relates, and crucially, how anyone who claims to know him should live. It sets the standard for the community.

Okay. And speaking of knowing God, the source talks about gospel identity. How does John describe who believers are? Does he call them Christians? He doesn't actually use that term, Christian.

He uses warmer terms like little children or children. And he explains this identity in a way that really connects back to his gospel, particularly chapter one. Ah, the prologue, where it talks about becoming children of God.

Exactly. John 1.12 says, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, his true identity, he gave the right, or the authority, to become children of God. Okay.

So that sounds like something we do. We receive, we believe, we get the right. It does sound that way initially, but then immediately verse 13 clarifies.

Right. That's the crucial addition. It is.

It says, these children are born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. So it's not about human effort or desire or ancestry. It's fundamentally divine work.

Okay. Hold on. This is where it gets tricky, right? How do those fit? Are believing and God doing the work of God part? This is where that theological concept of compatibilism, as the source mentions, comes into play.

It's this tension, this biblical reality, where our genuine human response- believing, receiving- works together with God's sovereign and kind of mysterious action in causing us to be born again. So both are true. Our agency and God's agency.

Yes. Think of it maybe like breathing. You actively inhale and exhale.

That's your action. But the air itself, the whole atmospheric system that makes breathing possible, that's a given, a reality outside of you that enables your action. Our faith responds to God's initiative and work through the gospel.

The new birth itself is God's act, his gift. So we can't really take credit for becoming God's children. That's the point.

It's an undeserved gift, rooted in God's work, received through faith he enables. And this identity, being born of God, you said, it connects back to that overwhelming theme of love. Absolutely.

When you encounter God, who is light, through the gospel message, you're brought into contact with the kind of love that's, well, staggering, as the source says, divine love, something totally new. And receiving Christ starts this whole process. It's both a result of God's love drawing you, and it results in experiencing that love, which then kicks off a lifelong transformation.

Which leads us to that 3D model of the balanced Christian life the source presents. Can you walk us through that picture? Sure. Imagine three lines meeting at a point, like axes on a graph.

You've got the horizontal line, the x-axis. Let's call that belief, or faith, or doctrine. You know, what you actually believe about the gospel.

Unbelief on one end, belief on the other. Okay. X is belief.

Got it. Vertical. Y-axis.

That's works. Or obedience. Ethics.

How you live your life. Your actions. Are they in sync with your beliefs? Maybe no works at the bottom, consistent obedience up top? So ideally, you want to be in that upper right quadrant, right? Believing the right things and doing the right things.

Seems logical. Yes. But John adds, and this is crucial, a third dimension.

Think of it as depth, the Z coordinate. This is relationship or love. That internal, personal connection with God and the love for others that flows out of it.

And this is where that Matthew 7 passage fits in: the Lord, Lord, people. It's a perfect sobering illustration. Jesus talks about people who say, Lord, Lord.

That's belief, x-axis. And they did mighty works in his name. That's work, y-axis.

They look like they're in the right spot. But Jesus says, I never knew you. The relationship, the Z coordinate, the genuine knowledge and love connection, it was missing.

Wow. So for John, real faith, this full scale faith, it's not just belief plus works. It's got to have all three.

Belief, works, and that relationship, that love. Exactly. They're interwoven.

And this is key to reading 1 John. John assumes these things go together. When he talks about, say, obedience, he assumes it flows from genuine belief and a real relationship with God.

When he talks about love, he assumes it's rooted in right beliefs and leads to obedience. They're not separate compartments you check off. They're organic parts of the same whole.

Precisely. It's the life of someone truly born of God, B-O-R-N, and also constantly being born by B-R-N-E, God's power and will. They're inseparable aspects of the transformation God works through the gospel.

So trying to isolate them, focusing only on doctrine but not living it out, or maybe being very loving but not caring about belief, misses John's point. It seems so. The source hints at these unbalanced states.

Maybe someone has the belief down but lacks the works or the love. Or maybe someone is all about deeds before creeds, lots of love, but no interest in Christian teaching or ethics. For John, genuine, full-scale faith, born of God, holds these three belief, works, and love together.

Okay. So now let's look at how John actually starts the letter itself, verses one to four. He's establishing his authority.

He is. And he grounds it firmly in eyewitness testimony. He says, essentially, we're not making this up.

We heard him. We saw him with our own eyes. We looked closely.

We even touched him. This word of life. Jesus.

Jesus, yes. The eternal life made visible, tangible. He's insisting on the reality, the historical fact of their experience with Christ.

And this isn't just his personal story. It's presented as, like, legal proof. In a sense, yes.

You know the Old Testament principle. The testimony of two or three witnesses establishes a matter. John is saying, we apostles, we are those witnesses.

Our shared experience is the solid foundation for everything I'm about to tell you. Okay. So he's got the authority.

What's his purpose in writing? Why tell them all this? He states it very clearly in verse three. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. He wants to bring the readers into this shared life, this community.

Fellowship with the apostles. Yes. But that's just the first step.

He immediately adds, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. That's the ultimate goal. Bringing them into a deep personal relationship, fellowship with God himself through Jesus.

And it leads to joy. That sounds almost counterintuitive for some people when they think about religion. Right.

But John says in verse four, and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Some manuscripts say your joy, but either way, the point is that true fellowship with God isn't a burden. It's the source of complete, full joy.

Being at peace, being in right relationship with the Creator. That's where real joy is found. And it's noticeable, looking at the text highlighted in the source, how often God, Jesus, Father, and Son pop up.

Constantly. It really underscores that this letter is God-focused, Christ-focused. It's not primarily about us and our problems, although it addresses them.

It's about who God is and what he's done in Christ. Theocentric, Christocentric. Okay.

So the foundation is God is light. What follows from that? How does that cash out in terms of living and relating to God, versus how 5 to 10 seem to tackle this? He basically repeats the core message. God is light.

Absolutely no darkness. And then bam, he confronts a problem, something going wrong in the community or being taught by opponents. Bogus confession idea.

Exactly. He hits two false claims hard. Verse six.

If you say you have fellowship with this God of light, but you're walking in darkness, living a life of sin, ignoring his ways, you're lying. You're not practicing the truth. Your walk doesn't match your talk.

Precisely. Then verses eight and 10. If you say you have no sin, you're deceiving yourself and the truth isn't in you.

And even worse, if you say you have not sinned, you make God himself a liar because his word consistently affirms the reality of human sin. So these are people whose claims are totally out of sync with the reality of God being light and the reality of their own lives. Yes.

It's a dangerous disconnect. Profession without reality. So if that's the wrong way, what's the right way to have fellowship with this God who is light? Verses seven and nine provide the positive path.

Verse seven. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, meaning living honestly, pursuing obedience, staying in that relational connection, believing the truth about God, then we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

So walking in the light enables fellowship and cleansing. It's the context for it. Yes.

The cleansing by Jesus' blood is effective as we walk in the light. And verse nine adds the crucial action needed when we inevitably fail and sin. Confession.

Right. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Honesty about our failings is key.

Why is confession so vital if Jesus' blood cleanses anyway? That's a really important question. It gets back to walking in the light. Confession isn't how we earn forgiveness.

Forgiveness is based on Christ's work and God's faithfulness. But confession is about living truthfully before the God of light. It's agreeing with God about our sin, saying, yes, this was wrong.

It keeps us in that honest relationship rather than trying to hide or deny, which would be walking back into darkness. It aligns us with reality, God's reality. Okay.

That makes sense. It keeps the relationship honest. Exactly.

It's the necessary response that keeps us oriented towards the light, receiving the cleansing he provides. So that brings us to the last part of the section, chapter two, verses one to six. Here, John seems to shift tone slightly, more pastoral.

You definitely feel his heart here. Verse one starts, But he knows we're not perfect. He knows.

So immediately he has the but if. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. An advocate, like a defense lawyer.

Sort of, yes. Someone who pleads our case. Yeah.

Because Jesus himself is perfectly righteous. He can stand before the Father on our behalf when we stumble. We're not left alone or condemned.

And then he introduces that big word, propitiation. Yeah, that's a weighty one. Propitiation basically means that Jesus's death satisfied God's just anger or judgment against sin.

Sin is serious. It requires consequences according to God's justice. Jesus, by dying in our place, absorbs that judgment and turns away God's wrath, satisfying his justice.

His death makes forgiveness possible. It makes it just for God to forgive. God remains true to his own righteous character while forgiving us because the penalty has been paid by Christ, the propitiation.

Okay. And then verse two says, This is not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. That sounds huge.

How does the source interpret that? Well, the source acknowledges there's been debate on this. The view presented is that, yes, it definitely secures a special benefit for believers. Our specific sins are paid for, ensuring salvation.

But it might also point to a common grace benefit for the whole world. Meaning perhaps that because of Christ's sacrifice, God holds back final judgment on the world for a time, allowing this period of grace where the gospel can go out. It doesn't mean everyone is

automatically saved, but that Christ's work has implications even for those who don't yet believe, primarily in delaying judgment.

Again, that's the source's perspective on a complex verse. We're just relaying that view. Right.

Understood. So we have this advocate, this propitiation, but how do we gain assurance? How do we know we actually know God? John gives a test, doesn't he? He does. A very practical one in verse three.

And by this, we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. There it is again: obedience. It's the evidence, the verification of the claim to know God.

Back to that y-axis. And he's pretty blunt about the flip side. Very blunt.

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

Strong words. A claim to relationship or belief without the corresponding life of obedience. John says that's not genuine.

It's another bogus confession. But what about when obedience is there? Ah, then verse five gives the positive picture. But whoever keeps his word in him, truly the love of God is perfected or completed, brought to its goal.

Keeping God's word, that's obedience, is where God's love finds its full expression in us. And he adds, by this, we may know that we are in him. So obedience confirms that the love and the relationship are real.

They all intertwine. Exactly. Belief, love, obedience- they work together as proof of being genuinely in him.

And the ultimate benchmark he sets. Verse six. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he, Jesus, walked.

Jesus's life becomes the pattern. Now, obviously, we can't walk exactly like Jesus. Right.

The source emphasizes this is an analogy. We are sinless. We don't atone for sins.

But we can reflect his character in our own lives: his humility, his service, his dependence on the Father, his prayer life, his integrity, his love. We aim to walk analogously to how he walked. So, wrapping up this whole first section, then, 1.1 to 2.6, what are the big takeaways? Well, we've seen that God's nature as pure light is foundational.

Our identity as children of God is a gift resulting from being born of God. This leads to a full-scale faith where belief, obedience, and relationship or love are inseparable. John tackles false claims where these are disconnected.

He shows that walking in the light means honesty, confession of sin, and receiving cleansing through Christ, our advocate and propitiation. And finally, assurance comes through

tangible evidence, keeping God's commands and striving to live as Jesus lived. It really sets the stage, doesn't it? It lays out the divine reality.

God is light. Our new identity in him. And then the practical outworking of that identity: a life aiming for truth, love, obedience, all made possible by Christ.

It absolutely provides the essential framework for everything that follows in the letter. You need this foundation. So, a final thought for you listening.

How does really grasping this idea that belief, obedience, and relationship aren't separate boxes to check, but are intrinsically linked parts of a single full-scale faith, a faith that comes from God's work in you and leads to real joy? How does that challenge or maybe deepen your own understanding of what it means to live in Christ and walk in the light? That's definitely something to chew on. Indeed.

Thanks for joining us for this deep dive into the opening of 1 John.