

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles

Session 7, 1 John 3:9-4:14, Sections 4 and 5,

6-min. Video Overview

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Have you ever seen a community, a really tight-knit group, just get completely torn apart? It's a painful thing. Well, today we're going to look at an ancient letter, 1 John. That's basically a crisis manual for that exact situation.

It's not just old history; it's a powerful game plan for putting the pieces back together. I mean, that's the big question, right? It could be your friend group, your team at work, whatever. When trust gets shattered, and people you thought were on your side just leave, how do you even begin to find your footing again? Well, that's the very world the people reading this letter found themselves in.

And we're not talking about a small disagreement here. A whole chunk of their community had walked out, and it left everyone who stayed behind feeling confused, hurt, and totally unstable. The author, John, is writing to a group that feels like the floor has literally vanished beneath their feet.

There is a technical word for this. It's called a schism, and it's exactly what it sounds like: a deep, painful split that just rips a group right in two. And you can feel the raw emotion of that split in every word John writes.

Wow, that one line says it all, doesn't it? It captures just how sharp this break was. It's not just, oh, they left. There's this deep sense of betrayal, this feeling that they no longer even share the same DNA.

So how on earth do you recover from that? Well, John doesn't just diagnose the crisis. He gives them a powerful two-part cure. All right, so part one of the cure is a warning, but you can think of it like a diagnostic test.

Before you can start rebuilding, you've got to figure out who's actually still on the team. You know, when everything is spinning in chaos, clarity is a lifeline. So John gives them these super clear, practical ways to figure out who was sticking to the original teachings they'd all received and, well, who wasn't.

And what's fascinating is how black and white he makes it. He frames it as a choice between two different families with totally different family traits. He says, look, you can tell who's who by what they do.

Do they make a habit of doing what's right and loving people, or is their life marked by sin and hate? Then he gets even more specific. He calls it the test of spirits. He's basically saying, hey, don't be naive.

Don't just believe every influential person with a convincing argument. You have to test them. And the number one non-negotiable test was this.

What do they believe about Jesus? Did Jesus Christ actually come in a real physical body? For this community, that was the anchor. And for all the people who passed that test, the ones holding on to the truth, John gives them this incredible shot of confidence. It's a reminder that their stability doesn't come from their own grit, but from God, who is way bigger than any crisis or outside pressure.

OK, so getting a diagnosis is crucial, but it's only half the battle. After figuring out the problem, John gives them the prescription for how to heal and rebuild. And it's all about one thing, the command to practice love.

Now, when John says love, he's not talking about some vague, warm, and fuzzy feeling. For him, love is a verb. It's something you do.

It's the tangible, visible proof of a real relationship. It's action. And here's the bedrock for that entire command.

This is why it matters so much. The reason they have to love each other isn't just because it's a nice idea. It's because it flows from the very character of God.

They are being called to be a reflection of who God is. And this is a super important distinction. John isn't saying that any feeling you call love is God.

Nope. It's the other way around. He's making this profound claim that God in his very nature is loving.

And that's the source of all true love. So if we're supposed to love, what's the benchmark? How do we know what it's supposed to look like? John points to one specific divine event. The standard for love isn't our feelings.

It's God's own unbelievable sacrificial act of sending his son. That's the measure. Yeah, that word, propitiation, it's a big one, I know.

But all it really means is an action someone takes to fix a broken relationship, to make things right again. And in this case, it's about Jesus' death being the ultimate sacrifice that deals with our sin. This is the act of love John is holding out.

And here's where he brings it all home. The logic is so simple and so powerful. He's saying, look at this incredible sacrificial love you have received.

Because of that, you are now expected to show that same kind of love to each other. That's the cure. That's how the community heals.

So you've got this warning to test everything and this command to practice love. When you put those two together, what's the result? Well, it leads to the ultimate goal for this shaken community, a deep unshakable sense of assurance. Think about it like this.

A schism in your community is like coming home to find a giant tree has crashed right through your roof. Everything is a chaotic mess. In that moment, what you need more than anything is to know you're standing on solid ground.

You need assurance. And here's where that assurance comes from. It's not from our own feelings.

Because let's be real, our hearts can be all over the place, telling us we're not good enough. John says, no, your assurance is based on something way more stable. The character of God, who is bigger than your feelings and knows the whole story.

And this just sums it all up perfectly. Real, lasting assurance isn't just one thing. It's the outcome of a balanced life where all these pieces work together.

You've got solid faith in who Jesus is. You've got active obedience to his commands. And you've got this tangible love for other people.

In the middle of all that, that's where you find assurance. So here's the real kicker. The cure for community crisis had to be a community solution.

This wasn't about finding assurance all by herself in a vacuum. No, it was something they built together by holding on to the same truths and actively, sacrificially loving each other. That is how they were able to stand strong after the storm.

And all of this leaves us with a pretty big question for ourselves. John gave his community a clear test for truth to get them through their crisis. So for us today, in a world that is just flooded with competing voices and opinions, what's your anchor? What's your ultimate test for what's really true?