

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles, Session 7, The Johannine Epistles, Session 7, 1 John 3:9-4:14, Sections 4 and 5

Audio Overview Podcast from NotebookLM

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Okay, let's unpack this. We're diving deep into the first letter of John today. Yeah, pulling insights from some really helpful material on two specific chunks.

Right, it focuses on 1 John 3.9 through 4.6, which the source calls the central warning, and then jumps to 4.7 through 4.1 toward the foundational imperative. That's it. And our goal really is to navigate these verses, kind of guided by the lecture, to understand what this full-scale faith idea actually looks like, you know, balanced and robust.

And the context John's writing into is, well, it's vital. Our source really highlights that he's talking to a community that's just gone through a painful split. Yeah, people they knew, people they trusted, had actually left, creating a lot of instability and uncertainty.

So John isn't just, like, giving abstract theology here. He's trying to help them figure out who's genuine, what real faith looks like day-to-day, and, you know, how to stand firm when everything feels shaky. Exactly.

So we'll look at this really crucial warning about going astray, but then also ground ourselves in that central command about God's love, which is just huge in John. Okay, but before we jump right into those sections, maybe we should quickly touch on that idea from earlier discussions, the balancing act. Good idea.

Yeah, balancing faith, the doctrine of Christ, with works, you know, keeping the commandments, and love, loving God, loving your neighbor. Right, that interconnectedness. Because for John, it seems like if one's really there, the others kind of have to be, too.

They're all woven together. Completely. Mentioning one implies the others.

It's his underlying framework. And knowing that helps make sense of how he moves between topics. It's not random.

Okay, so let's lean into that first section flagged by our source material, the central warning, 1 John 3.9 through 4.6. Now, what's interesting is the lecture points out that he starts this bit talking about love. Right, a summons to love. But pretty quickly shifts into a warning.

It's almost like he's showing the contrast, painting a picture of what not to be like, so you're more motivated to actually reflect God's love. That's a great way to put it. He opens in 3.9 with this really striking statement: no one born of God makes a practice of sinning.

Whoa, that sounds intense. It is. And the lecture notes the reason given is that God's seed, and people debate if that means the word, or God's nature, or maybe his offspring abiding in them, makes habitual sin fundamentally incompatible with being God's child.

And he immediately gives the test, verse 10, how you tell the difference between children of God and children of the devil. Yeah, boils down to two things, doesn't it? Practicing righteousness and loving your brother or sister. And that message from the beginning, he brings it up again.

He does. We should love one another, super clear. But then, bam, the counterexample: Cain.

Right. Our source emphasizes John saying Cain was of the evil one. And the really deserving part isn't just the murder, but the why.

Because his own deeds were evil and his brother Abel's were righteous. The warning is sharp. Don't be like Cain.

And right after that, a hard truth. Do not be surprised if the world hates you. Sort of expect it.

But the assurance comes right back, tied to love again. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. And if you don't love, you're still abiding in death.

He even says hating a brother is like murder, spiritually speaking. Someone who hates doesn't have eternal life abiding in them. Wow.

So then we get to the measure of this love he's talking about. And it's not warm, fuzzy feelings. Not at all.

By this, we know love: that he laid down his life for us. That's Jesus. And the challenge follows immediately.

We are to lay down our lives for the brothers. Which sounds extreme, maybe. But the material we looked at gives that really practical test.

You know, if you have stuff, resources, and you see a brother in need. But you close your heart; you shut down that compassion. How can God's love really be living in you? It underlines that this love John talks about isn't just words or talk.

It's deed and truth. That phrase "deeds and truth" feels so important, especially thinking about that split, that schism the lecturer mentioned. People had left, and it sounds like their actions were pretty unloving, maybe even hateful.

Exactly. John's saying, look, in this painful mess, you can actually see who's who. Real love isn't just saying the right things.

It's what you do. And that feeling, you know, when you see someone in need, and it bothers you, it moves you. The source suggests that's actually a good sign.

Yeah. It shows God is real to you. He's working in you, enabling you to actually participate in his kind of love.

OK, so then John connects this active, practical love directly to assurance versus 1924. Right. By this, by loving in deed and truth, we will know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.

Which must have been so stabilizing for them, you know, with all the division. He tackles that inner turmoil head-on if our heart condemns us. For God is greater than our heart and knows everything.

That line is incredibly powerful. The lecture really drew that out. How so? Well, it means our assurance isn't ultimately based on how good we feel about ourselves or whether we think we've got it all figured out.

It's rooted in who God is, his character, his perfect knowledge. So he's bigger than our doubts, our failings. Bigger than our failings, bigger than our finitude, bigger even than, like, overwhelming catastrophe.

Think of Job, you know, the Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's trust in God's command, his goodness, even when your own heart is just crushed or confused.

God knows everything. His perspective is the ultimate reality, not our shaky internal feelings. Okay.

So assurance in God, not ourselves. And if our heart doesn't condemn us. Then we have confidence before God, and we receive what we ask, he says, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

Which brings us right back to that balanced life again. Exactly. His combined command: believe in Jesus Christ and love one another.

Faith and love linked with obedience. And this is where, as the source material notes, John explicitly brings in the Holy Spirit for the first time in the letter, right? Yes. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him.

And by this, we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us. So the Spirit is key for this abiding, this assurance. Absolutely fundamental.

The lecture highlighted that the Spirit works assurance together with the Father, the Son, and our response: belief, obedience, love. And it's not just individual either. The Spirit creates a corporate presence, binding the community together, hugely important after that split.

Okay. Staying in this central warning section. Yeah.

Then comes the summons to choose 4.16. We have to make a decision. A really crucial instruction, especially when you're facing conflicting ideas, like they were with those false teachers. Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.

Test them. Why? To see whether they are from God. And he links it directly back to the schism because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

They've left the community. The test he gives is pretty specific. Foundational.

Yeah. Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Any spirit that doesn't confess Jesus in this way.

Is not from God. It's the spirit of the Antichrist. And this is such a key insight from the source material.

John isn't saying love means just accepting everything uncritically, being naive. Right. Love isn't just affirming whatever feels good.

No. Genuine love involves discernment. It means you actually have to test the voices, the influences, the ideas around you.

And the source clarified why this test about Jesus is so central. God himself is invisible, light, transcendent glory. But it's Christ who makes God known.

John 1.18. So what you believe about Jesus isn't just one doctrine among many. It fundamentally defines what you believe about God. So if you get Jesus wrong, like denying he was truly divine or denying he really became human, came in the flesh.

You ultimately get God wrong. The real Jesus, the one who reveals the Father, is the one who genuinely has come in the flesh. And our source mentioned, you know, throughout history, there are always movements challenging this.

Yeah. Denying the incarnation, reducing Jesus. Yeah.

Things like the myth of God incarnate, the Jesus seminar, even some popular theories around Easter sometimes. The call here is to stand firm on who Jesus truly is. Rely on the apostolic witnesses: John himself, Peter, James- the ones who actually saw him and lived with him.

And for those who do stand firm, there's this great reassurance in verses four to six. Huge confirmation. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them.

The false prophets, the ones who left. How? How they overcome. For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Your steadfastness isn't in your own grip. It's in God who is in you and among you. He doesn't change.

Even when cultures shift, or people walk away. And the contrast is sharp. They are from the world.

Therefore, they speak from the world and the world listens to them. Right. And the source connects them directly to those who left the church, who bought into a different source of authority.

Okay. And the lecture made an important distinction about the world here. Yeah.

Two senses. There's the world as the mission field: people to love, serve, care for the poor, build hospitals, that sort of thing. But then there's the world as this idolatrous system, anti-God, a rival kingdom that claims self-sufficiency, claims we are the authority.

And churches get into trouble. They get destroyed. Divisions happen when they ditch God's authority found in his word and the apostolic teaching and instead start chasing the world system's approval or adopting its values.

So the apostolic message itself becomes the test. Yeah. For ideas, claims, people, even spiritual forces.

Exactly. We apostles and those aligned with their message are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us.

Whoever is not from God does not listen. That's how you distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. Which is still so relevant for us, for you, listening.

It really underlines why we need to stay grounded in Scripture, in faithful teaching. You know, that regular input study sermons- it sharpens our discernment. Constantly, because of the competing claims that are always out there.

Okay. So let's sum up this central warning. It's a really strong call for discernment.

Watch out for that lovelessness like Keynes and beware of false teachers who mess with the core truth about Jesus Christ. Yeah. Choose that relationship with God, faith, obedience; find your stability in him because he's steadfast, and rely on that clear eyewitness apostolic teaching as your benchmark for truth.

And then after that intense warning, he pivots beautifully actually into the next section, 4.714, what our source calls the foundational imperative. Right. Having shown you what not to be, he lays out the positive foundation: love.

It doesn't cancel out faith or obedience, but it shows love is absolutely central. Yeah. The core command hits right away.

Verse seven: Beloved, let us love one another. And where does this love come from? Love is from God. And the proof: whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

And the flip side is just as stark. Verse eight: anyone who does not love does not know God. Why? Because God is love.

And John immediately shows how this divine love was made visible, manifest among us. God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. And the source pointed out that live there is Zoe life, that deep, dynamic, eternal life, not just biological existence, bios.

Okay. And verse 10 gives the definition of this love. And it's crucial.

It's not that we first loved God. No, it's the opposite. But that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins- propitiation, that heavy word, meaning atonement, satisfying divine justice.

Okay. So the source material draws out some really key takeaways from this for you listening. First, knowing God isn't just head knowledge.

Right. It means you actively show love; practice it. It's the marker, the evidence of that relationship: how you treat people, especially in the church community John was writing to- getting along, bearing with each other.

Not cutting people off as those who'd left had done. Exactly. Second point: God is love doesn't mean love is God.

Big difference. Explain that. God is a person.

Love is one of his attributes, maybe the most central one he reveals, especially in Christ. But he isn't just an abstract principle of love; saying God is love highlights how core it is to his being. And it's a communicable attribute, something he shares with us, unlike his omniscience, for example.

So people, even animals, maybe can show care because we're made in his image. But the specific kind of love John's talking about here is that self-giving, sacrificial love that flows directly from receiving God's love shown in Christ's death. Okay.

And third, the standard, the measure of true love. Isn't our feelings. It's not cultural trends.

It's God's action, specifically the cross, sending his son as propitiation. The source used that marriage analogy. Real love means sacrifice for the other, mirroring God's sacrifice for us.

Powerful. Okay. So building on that, John gives a second command to love, verses 11 and 14.

And it flows right out of what God did. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. It's the logical response.

He repeats that point. Yeah. No one has seen God the Father in his full glory.

But when we love one another, something amazing happens. God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. Perfected.

What does that mean here? The source clarified that, right? Yeah. It's not that our love suddenly becomes flawless. It means God's love achieves its goal.

It's God's intended purpose through us in our relationships with each other. His love completes its work in the community. And the lecture mentioned the power of small things here.

Absolutely. Like a simple email, a card, just choosing to sit with someone who looks lonely, or maybe visiting an elderly person. Those small acts of care are huge expressions of God's love being perfected, being made real among us.

And how do we know this abiding is real? That we're in him and he's in us? He brings the Spirit back again because he has given us of his Spirit. We know this abiding by the fruit it produces, which is loving one another the way God loved us. So the practical takeaway from the material is: if you want to feel more secure in God's presence, more assured.

Actively respond to the Spirit's nudges to care for others. Pray for them, yes, but also reach out tangibly. Doing that actually confirms and strengthens your awareness of his presence.

And John closes this section grounding it all in his own testimony. Yeah. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

He's essentially saying, look, the assurance I'm offering you, the truth I'm teaching, it's based on what I saw with my own eyes, what I received directly from God. Eyewitness stuff. Okay, so bringing these two big sections together, the warning and the imperative.

John gives this incredibly holistic picture. It's full-scale faith. The warning against the lies and the lovelessness sets the stage for the positive command to love, which is completely rooted in who God is and what he did in Jesus.

They're not separate ideas at all. Not at all. Two sides of the same coin.

How to live a life grounded in God's truth and God's love, especially when things are tough. It really hammers home that connection. Faith, obedience, love, inseparable.

And that discernment, especially about who Jesus is, based on that apostolic teaching, it's non-negotiable. Absolutely essential. And love isn't some vague feeling; it's action.

A response to God's action shown in real deeds toward each other. And the assurance we all look for, it's not found by looking inward so much. No, not primarily.

It's found in God's unchanging character, his perfect knowledge, and seeing the Spirit's work in us and among us, which is confirmed as we actually respond to him by believing, obeying, and loving one another. So here's maybe a final thought for you to mull over from all this. John makes it clear that the spirit of error is still active in the world, still challenging who Christ really is, still trying to redefine love away from God's sacrificial action.

Still happens all the time. So given that reality, how might actively practicing the specific kind of love John describes- you know, love rooted firmly in God's action in Christ, love shown in tangible deeds for fellow believers, and love that's always tested against that clear apostolic teaching about Jesus? How might that be the most powerful practical way for you to stay steadfast and actually discern truth from error in your own life today?