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1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 2

To show that followers of Jesus should be living the way God wants them to, and confessing their failures when they don't. A changing life builds confidence that faith is real. Forgiveness for failures gives assurance that God will still accept them - from 1 John: 5-10.

Q1. Do you think people really are free to choose their own moral beliefs?

· We are not so relative as we would like to think. For any one of us, there is someone, somewhere in the world right now doing something we don't believe they should be doing (for example, a pedophile might use the logic "everyone is free to choose their own moral beliefs" but that doesn't mean we're happy for them to abuse children). This means we do believe in absolutes (even if we disagree what those absolutes should be).

(As a side point: If we do believe there are absolutes when it comes to right and wrong (even if we disagree as to what those absolutes are), then the existence of God has the best explanatory power for this sense of absolutes.)

"I don't believe in the concept of 'sin' as such. I think we are all free to choose our own moral beliefs. I have mine, and you have yours".

1 John 1:5-10

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Note: the word "fellowship" just means partnership, where there is unity for a common purpose.

Q2. Are followers of Jesus free to choose their own moral beliefs?

· No – they are to walk in the light (1 John 1:7) and because God is light (1 John 1:5) this means acting like God does. To say you are a follower of Jesus and yet “walk in the darkness” (1 John 1:6) - then your faith is a lie.

Q3. What do you think it means to “walk in the darkness”?

· What it can't mean is that followers of Jesus never stuff up and do something God disapproves of – because John tells them what to do when they do sin (1 John 1:9).
· So to “walk in darkness” must mean a habitual pattern or way of life that is contrary to what God wants. It's one thing for someone who is a follower of Jesus to say: “oops, I stuffed up, I shouldn't have done that, and I really don't want to do it again”. It's a completely different order of things for someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus to say: “I know God really doesn't want me to do this but I am going to keep doing it anyway”.

Long before Jesus walked the earth, God's people, the Jews, knew they couldn't freely come into God's presence in the sanctuary of the Lord. Because God is pure and without sin, and they were sinners (or unclean), they needed to be purified. It was serious business.

Numbers 19:20 - The words of Moses, from 1300BC

“But if those who are unclean do not purify themselves, they must be cut off from the community, because they have defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on them, and they are unclean.”

Q4. The ‘blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7). How does Jesus' blood purify His followers?

· By dying for them, Jesus' blood purifies his followers – they become clean and able to be in God's presence, because Jesus takes the punishment they deserve for their sin. Being cleansed is another metaphor for forgiveness.

Getting back to John's letter ...

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Note: By “know” John means that his readers might have greater confidence and assurance in what they believe.

Q5. How does this section of 1 John's letter on sin help his readers with their confidence and assurance?

1. As followers of Jesus, they need to “walk in the light”. That they are concerned to live the way God wants them to – and are changing as people – is evidence that their

faith is real (personally true for them rather than evidence that the Christian faith is absolutely true)...this is confidence-building.

2. As followers of Jesus, they will still sin, and when they do, it's about confessing it and trusting that they are forgiven because Jesus has taken the punishment for it already...this helps with assurance, that the sin they have just committed won't put their relationship with God in jeopardy.

"Faith alone saves – but saving faith is never alone" – John Calvin

Q6. What if someone thinks they are a follower of Jesus but can't see any change in their life?

- You'd have to question whether there is real faith. Saving faith brings a changed life (that's why saving faith is never alone).
- A changed life shouldn't be the only indicator of faith – because behaviours can be faked. But if there is real faith, then there will be real change.

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