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Ask the bigger questions

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No fear

1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 7

To show us how we can be prepared to meet a day of judgement - 1 John 4:16b-18.

'Phobia' and fear are related¹.

Q1. Do you share any of these phobias? (or have other phobias you would be willing to admit to?)

The Phobia List

Ablutophobia - Fear of washing or bathing.
Amazophobia - Fear of riding in a car.
Acousticophobia - Fear of noise.
Ambulophobia - Fear of walking.
Acrophobia - Fear of heights.
Anablephobia - Fear of looking up.
Agoraphobia - Fear of insanity.
Anemophobia - Fear of wind.
Ailurophobia - Fear of cats.
Androphobia - Fear of men.
Albuminurophobia - Fear of kidney disease.
Anglophobia - Fear of English culture, etc.
Alektorophobia - Fear of chickens.
Angrophobia - Fear of becoming angry.
Algophobia - Fear of pain.
Anthrophobia - Fear of flowers.
Alliumphobia - Fear of garlic.
Anuptaphobia - Fear of staying single.
Allodoxaphobia - Fear of opinions.
Arachibutyrophobia - Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of one's mouth.
Amatophobia - Fear of dust.

¹ The phobia list, <http://www.phobialist.com>, excerpt from phobias beginning with the letter 'A'.

1 John 4:14-18

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.

18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Q2. What 'fear' do you think John is talking about here?

• John says 'fear has to do with punishment' (verse 18), so working back, the fear is associated with punishment brought about by a negative verdict on the 'day of judgment' (verse 17).

Medieval art had quite graphic images of hell².



Q3. Times have changed...why do you think that in our society today the 'day of judgement' is no longer seen as dangerous?

- We generally live as 'practical atheists' – we are not conscious of God from day to day;
- We find it hard to accept the idea of a personal God who takes our actions seriously;
- We prefer the notion of an all-tolerant God who does not judge;
- Deep down we think we are probably good enough to get to heaven, if there is such a place.

² Medieval illustration of Hell in the Hortus deliciarum manuscript of Herrad of Landsberg (about 1180).

Interestingly, the person who most often speaks of hell and judgement in the Bible is Jesus.

Luke 12:4-5, 13:28 - The words of Jesus

Jesus, when talking to his followers (the disciples), says:

4 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

And later Jesus says these words about the Jewish people who refuse to believe him: *"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."* ("Weeping" and "gnashing of teeth" is an image of intense suffering and torment.)

Q4. How can we be sure that there really will be a day of judgement, and know something of what it will be like?

- Natural human observation of the world wouldn't lead us to conclude that there will be a day of judgement. So it comes down to trusting that Jesus is right when he talks about it – that he is in a position of inside knowledge.
- Jesus doesn't talk about hell just to scare people – it's a plea from the heart that hell is real and worth avoiding.

Q5. According to John, how does someone not need to be afraid of judgement day?

- If we go through the logic:
 - Those who trust that Jesus is both Saviour and Son of God are in relationship with God (1 John 4:14-15).
 - Life with God is a life of love because God is love (1 John 4:16b-17).
 - Actions show belief. Loving others is evidence of belief and means that we don't need to fear punishment on the 'day of judgment' (1 John 4:18).

Q6. What if someone who says they are a follower of Jesus still fears punishment on judgement day?

- In this case it would be worth thinking:
 - Whether they really are a follower of Jesus. Do they really believe/trust that Jesus is Saviour and Son of God? (1 John 4:14-15). What we believe is evidenced in our actions. So if someone really believes that Jesus is Saviour and Son of God then belief will be evidenced in action – they will trust that Jesus is their rescuer with God (rather than trying to rescue themselves by their own efforts) and they will live with Jesus as their king.
 - What are they relying on for God to accept them? It could be that they do actually trust Jesus as Saviour and Son of God, but think that acceptance by God is based on their performance – and if this is the case, then judgement day is a day of fear.

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.

Q7. How does this section from 1 John on love and fear help the readers with their confidence and assurance?

· They don't need to fear a day of judgement. God has already told them how they can know the verdict ahead of time. Belief in Jesus (as Saviour and Son of God) is evidenced in action (love for others). If they trust Jesus in this way, they can also trust the promise that there is nothing to fear on judgement day, because Jesus has saved them completely.

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