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Knowing God

1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 8

To show that followers of Jesus can be confident of eternal life, and that one of the benefits of real relationship with God is to be able to approach him confidently in prayer – from 1 John 5:13-15.

“It is often said, mainly by the 'no-contests', that although there is no positive evidence for the existence of God, nor is there evidence against his existence. So it is best to keep an open mind and be agnostic. At first sight that seems an unassailable position, at least in the weak sense of Pascal's wager. But on second thoughts it seems a cop-out, because the same could be said of Father Christmas and tooth fairies. There may be fairies at the bottom of the garden. There is no evidence for it, but you can't prove that there aren't any, so shouldn't we be agnostic with respect to fairies?” – Richard Dawkins

1 John 1:1-3

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

Q1. How is belief in Jesus the Son of God different from belief in tooth fairies?

- There is historical evidence (including eyewitness accounts) that Jesus existed, that He lived and died and was raised back to life.
- Believing in this context means trusting God based on the objective evidence, as opposed to blind faith. Faith does require a “leap”, but the leap is not as great as often thought, because it is a response to this objective evidence.

1 John 5:13-15

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. 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life'. If John is writing to believers, then they would know about eternal life already – it's not as if he's telling them about eternal life for the first time. They can however grow in their confidence of this knowledge. One way John encourages them to grow in their confidence is by reminding them of the objective basis of their faith in his eyewitness account of Jesus. He then spends the bulk of his letter spelling out what faith looks like. *'We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands'* (1 John 2:3). A changing life is the evidence of faith, and should give a believer greater confidence.

Believers can also be confident when it comes to prayer.

Q2. Have you been in a situation yourself where you wouldn't have called yourself a believer but did say a prayer to God?

· Or you may know of other people who have.

Q3. What gave you the confidence to do this?

· This may not have been something that was thought about at the time.

Q4. If anyone has confidence to approach God in prayer you think it would be believers. So why do you think John needs to remind the believers to have confidence?

· There could be two reasons:

- From their side: knowing they are not always as obedient as they should be, then anxieties around whether or not they have God's approval might undermine their confidence to approach Him.
- From God's side: if their prayers aren't granted in the way they want, then they might start to doubt that God is interested in them – or that God is powerful enough to help, and so they might lose confidence to pray.

Q5. *'... if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us'* (1 John 5:14). Is this implying that if we ask for something that God isn't planning to bring about, then that prayer isn't heard?

· 1 John 5:15, the "hearing" is equated with action. The prayers God actions are the ones that are in accordance with His will/what He is planning to do or make happen. That doesn't mean that God doesn't hear prayers that are uttered that aren't in accordance with His will – it's just that He doesn't do anything about them. The word "hear" here is being used more flexibly than how we might use it.

Q6. How can a believer know if they ask God for something, it's "according to (God's) will"?

· Working backwards, by whether it's granted or not!

Q7. Is this saying that only believers can pray?

- John isn't making a comment about that. He is writing to believers (1 John 5:13).
- An unbeliever can pray – and God may or may not choose to answer that prayer. A believer has the confidence that God listens and will act on those prayers that are in accordance with His will.

Q8. Do we need to have all the answers and be 100% confident about Jesus to follow him?

- The whole purpose of John's letter is to give his reader's greater confidence and assurance in what they believe (if they were always 100% confident, he wouldn't need to write to them!)
- We all have doubts – but we can remind ourselves of who Jesus is and what He has done, and we can pray that He would help us trust Him.

Peter Kaldor from City Bible Forum explains what “confidence” looks like in his own journey from unbelief to belief¹.

“It was not until I was 22 that I first seriously engaged with the Bible. I had not grown up in a Christian home, though do remember praying to God whenever things were difficult. My journey to faith was certainly not precipitated by any personal crisis, as my life at the time was very carefree. In hindsight, it really is quite difficult to pinpoint why I first started attending church and reading the Bible with another young man I met there. Nevertheless, I do remember being struck by the openness and informality of the church meetings, and enjoyed listening to the lively question time. The people were very welcoming, which helped no doubt. The key step was meeting with Paul once per week to read the Bible. I certainly did not become a Christian overnight, as by nature I am fairly skeptical and analytical. I struggled accepting the need for the middleman – Jesus. I thought the Bible's description of human nature was very accurate, but it took some time for me to accept that I too needed saving. Probably a defining moment was breaking up with my non-Christian girlfriend, who paradoxically had first invited me to church. Since becoming a believer in Jesus, my confidence has primarily grown through understanding the integrity of Scripture (the consistent message we read about God throughout the Old and New Testaments). Learning more about the character of God and how to please him has enabled me, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make decisions based on my trust in Jesus. The example of other believers has also been a source of inspiration at times. This side of heaven, I certainly can't claim to have worked it all out or to be free of doubts; but with the disciples of Jesus I say *'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'* (John 6:68)” – Peter Kaldor

¹ Peter Kaldor, December 2009.

Q9. What are your personal confidence levels like when it comes to Jesus?

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