

Session 1: What was John thinking?

1 John 1:1-4

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Who wrote this book? Unusually this letter does not begin with the author introducing himself. Hebrews is the only other book that also does this. One reason might be that the author knows the audience very well as is evidenced from the text and so no introduction is necessary. The evidence (from the content of the letter and the early church fathers) suggests that the letter was written by the apostle John who also wrote the 4th gospel. There is a huge similarity between 1 John and John's gospel, in language, style and content. Any differences can be accounted for in the different reasons for writing. The Gospel of John was written for non-Christians to arouse their interest in Jesus (20:30-31) the epistle was written for Christians to give them an assurance of faith (5:13). Consequently the gospel contains 'signs' that are intended to draw people into faith in Christ, while the letter contains tests by which real faith is judged.

It is clear that John's purpose is to protect his readers and to ensure that they go on in their spiritual lives. If they remain committed to Christ, he will be happy (1:4). So he challenges them to live credible, holy lives (2:1) and to be confident and assured in their faith (5:13). This is a really useful book because it helps Christians to keep going even though we live in a world of great uncertainty.

What kind of faith was John asking these people to commit themselves to?

A Faith based on Evidence (1:1, 2)

The Christian faith is bound up in Jesus Christ. Without him it makes no sense, with him it is coherent and tangible. When we talk about believing in Christ we are dealing with something very solid and tangible. Christian faith is not a leap in the dark. It is faith based on solid evidence. It is reasonable faith not blind faith with the absence of reason.

A Faith to be Experienced (1:1, 2)

Being a Christian is not just about having head knowledge, it involves having a personal experience of Jesus. Merely accenting to the existence of Jesus is not enough. True knowledge involves truly experiencing Jesus.

A Faith that Promotes Unity (1:3)

A true faith in Jesus is the basis for Christian unity with the Trinity at the centre. Everyone who has genuinely entered into a relationship with Jesus is bound into a deep and profound relationship with each other.

A faith that brings Joy (1:4)

Real fulfilment can come from sharing a common bond in Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. *How is the Christian faith portrayed by the secular media and society at large and how does this differ from what we know to be true?*
2. *What evidence is there that our beliefs/ faith is true?*
3. *How do we prevent our faith merely becoming an intellectual exercise?*
4. *What barriers prevent Christians from having real unity and fellowship and what can we do to overcome these barriers?*
5. *Someone once said, 'going to church is like an endurance race, you don't enjoy it you just need to get on with it'? Have you ever felt this way – discuss. Should church bring us joy, if so why?*