

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF SECOND JOHN

Why bother with the shortest book in the Bible from an unknown writer to an unknown recipient written at an unknown date and an unknown place? Because its message is simple, powerful and absolutely vital for Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! He is writing to us about our problem in our time, written in our way. This letter is so short it could almost have been a text message.

The style and theme of the book are so similar to I John and to John's gospel that we are going to go with the early Christian tradition that John was the writer. According to early church history, John the apostle was based in Ephesus from about 70-95 AD after which he was exiled to the island of Patmos,(Rev.1:9) returning to Ephesus about 97 AD where he died several years later. In this letter he only identifies himself as 'the elder' much as in the gospel of John he calls himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' rather than naming himself.(Jn.13:23; 21:7)

John writes to 'the chosen lady and her children',(1) and sends greeting in closing from 'the children of your chosen sister'.(13) This is probably a way of referring to a local church greeting another one as, together, the bride of Christ.(Rev.21:2)

One word stands out, being used 5 times in just 13 verses. 'Truth' was a favourite theme of John, used far more often in his gospel and letters than in the rest of the books of the New Testament. He sees truth as what unites us as Christians and the key to Christian living. His reason for writing appears to be the threat to truth which was arising in his time. History identifies this as teaching called Gnosticism which attacked the Christian understanding of who Jesus Christ was when He came to earth. Heresies come and go so this letter is immensely relevant to our day and the particular attacks on truth which are happening now.

Everything, according to John, comes from God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Truth communicates to our minds, producing the love of God in our emotions, and a commitment to walking His way in our will, which above all will show in love for one another and a hunger to know more of the truth.(Matt.22:36-40; Jn.13:34,35) Truth is about three issues, grace – everything God has freely given us in Jesus, mercy – above all forgiveness which means that we do not receive the judgement we deserve, and peace – the marvellous inner tranquillity because we are no longer at war with God or each other.(1-6)

Truth however was under attack from liars who denied that Jesus Christ, the Son of God took on a human body and became man in the fullest sense. This is always the heart of false teaching.(Jude 4) The Devil's one objective is to persuade us that Jesus is not fully God and fully man. Every other wrong teaching follows from this whether it concerns His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, death on the cross, resurrection, indwelling as His Holy Spirit, promised return, His inspiration of scripture, work as Creator and eventual judgement. It is all too easy to be misled with tragic consequence upon our Christian lives. We are simply missing out on all He wants to be in us now and in eternity.(7-9)

So devastating are the results of allowing this teaching into our Christian families that John urges us to avoid fellowship with such people totally. We are not to avoid the needy or even the worst sinners. They are, as Jesus pointed out, the sick needing a doctor.(Matt.9:12) We are not to avoid debating wrong teaching publicly. Paul, Barnabas and later the other leaders did not run away from public discussion about legalistic teaching.(Acts 15) Paul was quite prepared to confront Peter before others when He was concerned that by his example Peter was giving a false message.(Gal.2:11-21) Philip challenged Simon in Acts 8:12,13; Peter took on the high priests in Acts 4:19,20; Paul resisted the teaching of the Jewish leaders repeatedly in Acts 23-26. The warning here is about inviting such a false teacher into our homes. By doing so we will give the wrong message to our families by implying that this person is one of us. We are to treat them with courtesy and dignity as fellow human beings for whom Jesus died.(I Pet.3:15) We are to assume that this person does not know Christ.(10,11)

John recognises the limits of a letter on paper, however well written, when dealing with an emotionally highly charged issue such as this one. He knows how good it is to be able to meet face to face, to look and listen before jumping in with our view of the situation. When we meet personally we can talk together and read the body language which says that the message has been heard and that we are one in the Lord Jesus. Then we can plan in a constructive way together how to help those who have been trapped by wrong teaching. And so the joy of Christian fellowship and shared ministry become full.(12,13)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. What according to John is the secret of Christian unity? What do we have to do for truth to become love in our lives? What is the problem when different Christians each claim to have truth yet are in conflict with one another?(verses 1,2)
2. Explain grace, mercy and truth in your own words. How exactly do the Father and the Son make each of these available to us? What then do we have to do for this to happen?(verse 3)
3. How does John encourage the believers who are being faithful? What threat does he see to the continuing health of the church? What is the heart of false teaching? Give modern examples. Why are false teachers not sincere in their beliefs?(Jn.8:44; I Jn.2:18) How can they be a threat to even established Christians? Is a false teacher really a Christian?(verses 4-9)
4. How are we to deal with false teaching? Why are we not to receive false teachers into our homes?(verses 10,11)
5. Why is it better to meet face to face when we can, rather than just in print or on a computer screen or a mobile phone?(verses 12,13)