

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN FIRST JOHN – PART ONE – INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER ONE

The Author of this little book is God;(II Tim.3:16) the writer chose not to name himself, presumably as his way of saying it was his message which mattered, not him. However the style of writing is so similar to that of the Gospel of John that Christians have always assumed they were both written by John, who with his brother James, and Peter, were the three apostles who shared many privileged moments with Jesus.(Lk.8:51; 9:28; Matt.26:37) This would certainly be supported by the writer's claim to have heard, seen, and touched the Word of Life.(I Jn.1:1) John described himself in his gospel not by name but as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', not meaning that he was loved more than the others but simply that he was overwhelming aware, more than anything else he knew about Jesus, how much He loved him.(Jn.13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20) What a great place from which to begin a new Bible study!

Like Peter and Andrew, John and his brother were Galilean fishermen.(Matt.4:21) For reasons we can guess, John and James were nicknamed by Jesus, the Sons of Thunder.(Mk.3:17) They had a mother who was ambitious for their careers.(Matt.20:20) Putting Mk.15:40 and Jn.19:25 together it may be that she was actually Jesus' Auntie Salome, Mary's sister. That might explain why she could push so hard for her sons' promotion.

John's message is abundantly clear. Being a Christian is about knowing Jesus, and knowing that we know Him. In John's time there were many weird and confusing ideas around about knowledge which were affecting Christians. Collectively they are known as Gnosticism. John answered them beautifully, but equally he provided answers for the 21st century when there are again strange concepts of knowledge which are either false because they start from somewhere other than the Bible or may even deny that there is knowledge in any absolute, eternal sense. This is therefore a book for today.

Before starting a detailed study I recommend you to read through the book several times to grasp its main themes, divide it into logical sections, and, if you agree with my suggestion that knowledge is a key idea, mark every use of the word 'know'. By my reckoning it is used 36 times in English but this is a translation of two different Greek words, ginosko = know, and oida = perceive or see. They are obviously related ideas because knowing is based on seeing and understanding. If you have access to a concordance it would help to check which of these two words is used on which occasion.

Chapter one does not use the word 'know' but it is nevertheless about two things we can know for certain. Read this chapter over again and see if you can see what they are.

1:1-3 Q.1 What similarities can you see between these opening verses and John 1:1-18? What in each case are the main points that John is making? Why is this such an important starting point for an explanation of the Christian message? What is John claiming as the grounds for saying 'I know that what I am about to tell you is the

truth.'. How can we have the same kind of certainty when we share the gospel with others?

1:1-3 Q.2 John uses the word 'life' three times to sum up his message regarding Jesus. What three ideas about being a Christian is he expressing in using this word? What does John promise will be the consequence of receiving his message? How would this introduction come as a surprise to people who only saw a relationship with God in terms of rules to be kept?

1:4 Q.3 How would John benefit from writing this letter? What should also motivate us to share the message of life in Christ?

1:5-10 Q.4 What new idea does John now introduce which was also a major theme in his gospel? How do 'light' and 'darkness' effectively describe the world in which we live? If you are about to clean a room what effect does switching on the light have? What effect therefore will meeting Jesus have on our awareness of ourselves?

1:5-10 Q.5 When the light of Jesus comes on in our understanding and we realise we are dirty because of sin, what answer does John offer us? How can blood make us clean? What amazing statement is there here about how much sin will be cleansed by meeting Jesus at the cross? Why do people find this too difficult to accept? What effect does it have when they doubt this promise?

1:5-10 Q.6 What two opposite responses do people make to this promise? What is the condition for being cleansed from sin? To whom do we have to confess our sins? What is the difference in real life between being forgiven and being cleansed? Why is it important to show people that they are promised both? Why does John twice repeat his warning to those who deny that they are dirty in God's eyes?