

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF FIRST JOHN PART FOUR

Having explained in chapter two how we can know that we really know Jesus because we find ourselves living like Him, and how because He lives in us we can know the truth as He becomes our Teacher, John moves on to consider two areas of certainty in relation to the love of God.

The Father has shown how much He loves us by making us His children. Like all children we will come to resemble our Father. Those who do not know Him will not understand the family resemblance. This change to be like Him happens for two reasons. Firstly the more we look at Jesus, and live with Him, the more like Him we will become.(3:1-3) Secondly we take on the habits of our Father because His nature is within us. Just as in a natural sense children resemble their father because of nurture, living with him, and nature, inheriting characteristics from him, so as children we come to be like our Heavenly Father for the same two reasons. Practising sin or practising righteousness describes habitual behaviour. We have already established in chapter one that we will sin at times and need again to be forgiven and cleansed. Our habits reveal our natures. If we are children of the Devil because we habitually listen to him, we will sin as a habit, which will be apparent because it will be against the law of God. If on the other hand we are born again through Christ, who died for us, into the family of God, our habits will be to live like Him.(3:4-9)

But just what does righteousness look like in real life? It looks like the love of God! As children of God we will find ourselves showing love for the other members of the family, our spiritual brothers and sisters. We will be in sharp contrast to Cain who, choosing to depend on his own efforts to please God rather than God's provision in Christ, was jealous of his brother, Abel, and hated him enough to murder him.(Gen.4) The attitude of the heart determines the action.(3:10-12)

So there is a simple choice. We can be spiritually dead, hate and kill, or alive in Christ, and love our brothers. John goes on to list five ways in which we will know that what we are experiencing really is the love of God. Firstly there will be a willingness to die for our Christian brother or sister, as Jesus did for us.(3:13-16; Jn.3:16) This in a literal sense is something most of us will not have the opportunity to test out in practice, and even if we do, then only once. However every time we put husband or wife, children, friends or neighbours before our own needs we are dying to ourselves.(Rom.6:11)

Secondly we can very readily demonstrate the love of God by responding to the physical needs of others whether in our own country or in the developing world where there are a billion people trying to live on less than a dollar a day.(3:17,18; Jas.2:14-16)

Thirdly we will be certain of the love of God when everyone, beginning with the Devil, is trying to condemn us by criticism and judgement because we do not fulfil their demands. If we know that God has forgiven us, and because of Christ is pleased with us, then what does it matter what anyone else thinks? Twice the Father reminded Jesus and those listening that He was pleased with His beloved Son.(Matt.3:17; 17:5) This must have set Jesus free from the condemnation of family, friends and enemies

to be Who He was intended to be. The love of God gives us the same freedom just as a reassuring hug from a loving parent gives us the same wonderful reassurance that all is forgiven.(3:19,20)

Fourthly the love of God means that we have the confidence to share absolutely anything that is on our hearts with our Father, knowing that He will do the very best for us. In any problem we ask Him about, He will give what He truly knows we need if only we trust that He knows best, which in turn will show in the way we live His way.(3:21,22)

Finally as by faith we settle on the habit of letting Him in us live as He wants, the love of God will give us a marvellous, comforting, continuing sense of His presence in our hearts and lives.(3:23,24)

In chapter four John moves on to two further questions needing certainty. How can we be sure it is God's Spirit speaking to us? How does God show His love to us?

4:1 Q.1 If we were to hear a voice claiming to be God or to see a vision of an angel saying he was from God should we obey him?(II Cor.2:11;11:14) What might be the danger of doing so?

4:2,3 Q.2 What test does John propose to check a spirit's identity? What does it mean to 'confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh'? Can you think of examples of how people have been misled in this way? What have we already learned about the characteristics of antichrist which might help us to be safe in such a situation?(2:18-23)

4:4-6 Q.3 Why do we not need to be fearful of false teachers claiming to be from God? Who listens to false teachers? Who listens to true teachers? How does being part of the body of Christ help to protect us from being misled by false spirits?

4:7,8 Q.4 What are the two essential conditions which enable us to love as God does? Is it possible to show real love if we do not know God?

4:9-11 Q.5 How did God show He loved us? What is propitiation?(Rom.3:25; I Jn.2:2) What practical effect does it have upon our daily lives?(3:16)

4:12-15 Q.6 If no-one has ever seen God then whom did Adam, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah and many others in the Old Testament meet?(Col.1:15; Jn.1:18) How can we help people in the world today to see God?(3:17; Jn.14:9) How can we help others to hear God?(4:2) What relationship with God is necessary for both these things to happen?

4:16-18 Q.7 Once again what do we have to know to be able to love like God does? How will God's love for us give us confidence in the face of judgement in heaven or on earth?(3:19-22)

4:19-21 Q.8 What two things does John say are completely incompatible? What then is the secret of loving our brothers or sisters even when they are hard to love?(3:23,24)