

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF FIRST JOHN – PART TWO

This simple letter is very relevant to today's world because it is about being certain of our relationship with Jesus Christ in an uncertain world. Without introducing himself by name, John, in his usual fresh, clear style, launches into two matters about which we can be sure even in a society which doubts everything.

First he is certain about what he has to say. He met Jesus personally. He saw Him, heard Him and touched Him. Having lived with Jesus for three years, no-one could say John's message was the result of an illusion, an emotion or an opinion. To the Jewish Council, John and Peter, when told to keep quiet about the risen Christ, said 'we cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard.' (Acts 4:20) We too can speak with the same quiet, confident courage to any audience about the One we have met.

John's message, as in his gospel, is one of Life. First he speaks of the Word of Life, because our understanding of Jesus is to be an intelligent one, the Word, communicated to us by God throughout the Bible. Second it is Life which has been manifested to us, shown to us in a Person who demonstrated through every moment of His life that truth really could work in human experience. Third it is eternal life, the life of heaven, not just one day when we die but now and for ever the same, a taste of heaven on the way to heaven. (1:1-3)

He knows that his message will change people. He expects it will change relationships, from selfish individualism to fellowship, which literally means 'sharing'. We will share the life of God with Him and with each other. John will have much more to say in his letter about this. He will call it 'love'. For him sharing this message will be a source of immense joy. There is no more satisfying experience as a Christian than to share life changing truth. (1:4)

John now introduces his third key word, 'light'. Knowing God is like having the light switched on in a dark world. The very first creative act of God was to make light. (Gen.1:3) When Jesus came into the world He was 'the light of the world'. (Jn.9:5) Switching a light on in a dark room reveals the dirt which needs to be cleansed. Christ's presence in our world reveals sin, the dirty consequence of our independence of God. Our first reaction is to lie to the world by denying sin just as a child told to have a shower denies that he needs one. The Devil's purpose is to keep us in the dark by blinding us to the truth that we are dirty because of sin and that cleansing is available in the blood of Jesus. (II Cor.4:4) He is a liar and his first lie is 'dark is ok'. (1:5,6)

Having our eyes opened to the light of Jesus means that we can have a relationship with each other based on cleansing. Sin spoils fellowship with God and every human relationship. Every hindrance to enjoying God and each other is removed by the blood of Jesus. Again for emphasis John repeats that to deny the problem of sin is to lie to ourselves. There is a simple condition for cleansing. We need to admit that we are dirty. Confession in the Bible is first to God and then, where necessary, to those we have harmed. Forgiveness affects how we stand with God. Cleansing is how we feel about our sin. Once again John reminds us of the completeness of forgiveness.

Coming into the light of Jesus means that we are forgiven absolutely all sin, past, present and even future. It is the second great certainty of this first chapter. For the third time John claims that denying sin is a lie. It is the ultimate lie which says God is a liar!(1:7-10)

Having explained in chapter one why he knows that his message is true and how we can be certain we are completely forgiven, John now goes on to present two more areas in which Christians can be absolutely confident.

2:1,2 Q.1 What does John say is his purpose in writing this letter? What on the other hand is God's expectation of us in relation to sin?(1:8,10) So what provision has He made for sin? If Jesus is our Advocate, our lawyer in heaven, how can He speak for us before the Judge? 'Propitiation' means that He took the blame and paid the price. Give practical examples of this in daily life.

2:3-6 Q.2 In what two ways in this section does John tell us that we can know that we know Jesus? How are the two ways he describes really the same thing? What needs to be our response to the Word of God for this to happen?

2:7-11 Q.3 How will living in the manner Jesus lived show in daily life? Why does John describe this as both an old commandment and a new one?(Lev.19:18; Jn.13:34) How does light give rise to love and darkness to hate?(1:5-7)

2:12-14 Q.4 What does John say in turn to children, young men and fathers? If we think of them as a series of steps, how does each step lead on to the next?

2:15-17 Q.5 What is the alternative to growing strong in the knowledge of God? What does it mean to 'love the world'? What three forms does loving the world take? Compare these to the Devil's first temptation in Gen.3:6. Why is it futile to love the world?

2:18-25 Q.6 According to this section who or what is 'antichrist'? What are the characteristics of antichrist? How therefore can antichrist be recognised? What is our protection against antichrist? How can we be certain that antichrist is wrong?

2:26-29 Q.7 What great advantages do we have as Christians in trying to deal with wrong teaching? Who according, to verses 20 and 27, lives in us? What will He do if we let Him? Does this mean that we should not listen to the teaching of others? What is to be our simple response to knowing He lives in us? How will we recognise others in whom He also lives?