

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF FIRST JOHN PART FIVE

Remember how John's letter, like his gospel, begins by introducing three themes, light, life and love? The light of truth from God when received by faith produces eternal life. The distinguishing feature of the life of Christ in us is God's kind of love.

Regarding all three we can have certainty. John's discussion moves back and forth between knowing we have light, life and love. In chapter one, John is sure he is telling the truth as he speaks of what he has heard, seen and touched of Jesus Christ.(1:1-3) In chapter two he assures us we can know what the Bible means if we let Christ, the Anointed One, live in us and be our Teacher.(2:18-29) As a consequence we need not be misled, as others would easily be, by antichrist or false teachers, even if we are young Christians. Now for the third time he returns to the question of knowing the truth as we try to decide if it is God's Spirit or another spirit who is speaking to us.

We have a responsibility to check as we listen with our ears to teaching, or in our hearts as we read and pray. It is so easy to be confused by the many varieties of false teaching. There is one simple test. What does the Spirit/spirit say about Jesus? The Holy Spirit will always present the New Testament Jesus as the Old Testament Christ, God in the fullest sense become truly Man. If the Son of God, really came to earth, born of Mary, then she must have been a virgin, and He had to be the Creator with the power to do miracles; He was able to be sinless and therefore to die in our place on the cross; it was inevitable that the Father would raise Him back to life, take Him back to heaven, send Him as His Spirit into our lives and that He will one day return.

First and foremost false teachers will attack or neglect some part of this story as a starting point for destroying our whole concept of who Jesus is. A watered down or alternative message is the objective of antichrist. As we have already seen in chapter two,(2:18-22) antichrist can be thought of as 'it', a movement throughout history, or 'them', particular false teachers who have openly or subtly challenged the Truth. It makes sense to assume too that the Devil will make one last major attempt to divert us from the whole gospel before his final defeat when Jesus returns.(II Thess.2:7-10) We can be certain that the Spirit of Christ who lives in all Christians,(Rom.8:9) is greater, stronger and wiser than the most cunning and attractive wrong ideas with which we will be bombarded, even at times from within the church.(4:1-6)

In the second half of the chapter, John picks up his other themes of life and love again because this is how the light of truth in action will look. He repeats as a new starting point his statement from chapter 3:1-10 that Christians will grow like their Father for two reasons; we are born of Him, nature, and know Him, nurture. Love is only possible if we know Him in which case it is inevitable.(4:7,8)

How do we know God loves us? There are two compelling reasons. Firstly He sent His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins.(4:9,10; 2:2) The word propitiation, *hilasmos*, is derived from the same word as the word for mercy seat, *hilasterios*.(Heb.9:5) On the mercy seat in the tabernacle in the Old Testament, the blood of a bull was offered once a year taking the place and the blame for the entire sin of a whole nation. Jesus' blood shed on the cross was once and for all for the whole world.(Heb.7:27; 9:28) As we saw in chapter one, this is the basis for our certainty that we are forgiven.(1:7,9) Secondly God showed His love by sending the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to live inside us, taking up residence there once and for all. As we learned in chapters two and three this is the grounds for our certainty that we know Him because our lives change from within and love appears.

How will God's love show in us? John lists five ways, each of which is a direct outworking of His love for us. First, as He showed Himself to us in Jesus, so He will show Himself to

others by loving through us.(4:9,12) Second, as He died for us we will be willing for whatever it takes to meet someone else's need.(4:10,11; 3:16-18) Third, as He abides, makes His home, in us and we in Him, we will want to invite others to be at home in Jesus too.(4:13,14) Fourth, as He is our Teacher, we will want to confess Him to others.(4:15) Fifth, because we know He will stick with us whatever happens, we have the confidence to be fearless before the judgement of God one day in heaven, and the attacks of men every day on earth. Fear and love simply do not go together.(4:16-19; 3:19-21) So let us make up our minds to receive God's love and let it show to our brother or sister - or not. We cannot have one without the other!

In the final chapter, John brings his themes of certainty together and draws some surprising practical applications.

5:1-5 Q.1 What according to this section are the consequences of believing in Jesus as the Son of God? How does each outcome of faith lead on to the next one?

5:6-8 Q.2 Comparing these verses with Jn.3:3-7 what might be the significance of water, blood and the Spirit? If so, how does each idea about Jesus contribute to our certainty that we are children of God? How also do these three ideas point us to the most effective way to convince others to believe in Jesus Christ?

5:9-12 Q.3 Why is the witness of God within us so much better than just taking the word of others about the gospel? How does this idea work in practice? What has to happen for an unbeliever to move from saying, 'I think the Christian message is true.' to 'I know that I am a Christian.'

5:13-15 Q.4 John gives us one final grounds for being certain about our relationship with God. What is it? What according to this section is the essential condition for prayer being answered? How does this help to explain other promises about prayer such as in Matt.7:7; 21:22; Jn.15:7; Rom.8:26,27.

5:16,17 Q.5 What does this passage teach us about what loving our brother may mean in practice? What decides whether sin is leading to death or not? (Matt.12:31,32) What is the link between answered prayer and loving our brother?

5:18-20 Q.6 How does John summarise how we can be sure of our relationship with God and why it is so important to know where we stand with Him? How does verse 19 help to explain why suffering happens in God's world?

5:21 Q.7 How might idols undermine our Christian certainty? How is any other world religion different from the Christian message? On your knees before God list what you are certain about as a Christian. If there are important gaps or uncertainties, ask God to show you how they can be removed. Believe Him to do it!