

HEREBY WE
KNOW

*A Study In The Epistles
Of John*

Other Books in the
BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

- ACTS MADE ACTUAL
- SACRED HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY
- THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE
- ROMANS REALIZED
- HELPS FROM HEBREWS
- THE GOSPEL OF JOHN VOL. I & II
- GUIDANCE FROM GALATIANS
- THE GREATEST WORK IN THE WORLD
- PAUL'S LETTER TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS
- SURVEY COURSE IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
VOL. I
- SURVEY COURSE IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
VOL. II
- LETTERS FROM PETER
- THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS
- STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS
- THE SEER, THE SAVIOUR, AND THE SAVED
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION
- SURVEY COURSE IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
VOLS. III & IV
- STUDIES IN LUKE
- JAMES AND JUDE
- THE GOSPEL OF MARK
- GENESIS VOLUME I
- STUDIES IN SECOND CORINTHIANS

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK

HEREBY WE KNOW

A STUDY OF THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

by

Clinton R. Gill

Paraphrase

By J. B. Rotherham

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

Copyright 1966
Clinton Gill
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

to

Owen L. Crouch

Who Introduced Me To I John

and to

The Wednesday Night Bible Study Group

at

West Liberty, W. Va.

Who Were My "Guinea Pigs"

PREFACE

THE RELEVANCE OF I JOHN

Christian life is a personal encounter with God in the person of Jesus. It was never intended by its Author to become a moralistic ethic or a legalistic religion. Nowhere is this spelled out any more clearly than in the writings of the Apostle John.

The touch-stone of the Christian life is the historic fact of the incarnation. In the presence of the incarnate Christ, a man's life is no longer a matter of ceremonial obedience to an external God. It is no longer an ethic suggested by the ethereal, insubstantial "Ultimate Ground of Being" which has no anchor and no certain base.

At a time and in a place in human history, man was visited by God on his own home ground, and neither man nor the ground has been quite the same since! To man's demand, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us," Jesus still answers, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (See John 14:1-ff)

It is to replace philosophical uncertainty with historic reality that John wrote both his Gospel and the Epistles which bear his name. Whether the cause of confusion be the gnosticism of the first and second centuries or the God-myth battle of twentieth century theology, the oil on troubled waters is always "What we saw and our hands handled." (I John 1:1)

Today's young adult American is an open minded agnostic. He is an inquirer. He doubts, but he is not necessarily cynical. He raises questions and he wants answers that are real. He will not listen to the pronouncements of pious platitudes which squelched the imaginative thinker of a generation ago.

Modern Young America accepts few of the old absolutes as valid. He values personal relationships above abstract or *ex officio* virtue. He wants frankness more than he wants nicety; honesty more than propriety.

Significantly, such young adults tend to be suspicious of the institutionalized churches with their preconceived and pat answers for life in the complexities of our day.

Simultaneously, this new generation of Americans, many of whom "belong to church," are acutely interested in the basic meaning of life. It is just here that the greatest challenge comes to today's Christian minister and adult teacher.

PREFACE

No writer in the Bible has supplied us with information more pertinent to this challenge than has John. It was his purpose, in another historical context, to answer the very questions Young America is asking.

John too is concerned with relationships. He experienced a personal relationship with the Incarnate Word. That relationship he presents as the revelation that God is light. To walk within the circle of that light is to come into a relationship with God and with the Word and with all other men who also walk in the light.

Moral issues are settled for those who walk in the light. It is upon this basis that the sin problem is solved.

Social relationships, as well as religious, are illuminated by this light. John says we are not to go on loving with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.

In short, a personal relationship to Jesus as the Christ, accompanied by an honest attitude toward our moral weakness, a practical love of our fellow human beings, and a firm conviction that Jesus really is more than a "sort of celestial Big Brother," . . . these things are life indeed and abundant.

This little book is sent forth with the prayer that it may help its readers to meet the challenges of our age and give those it teaches and touches a faith to live by.

INTRODUCTION

HELPFUL FEATURES

To make the best use of this book you should be familiar with several features which are designed to help you in your study of the Epistles of John.

First . . . read the preface carefully. It will help you appreciate how these epistles are as alive today as when they were written . . . their message just as needed.

Second . . . study the "Words We Must Understand." John's epistles were written in answer to a specific heresy which was beginning to be felt by the followers of the Way. They were written in koine Greek of the First Century. You will understand the epistles much more easily if these words are a part of your own vocabulary.

Third . . . The outline of this book is included as part of the text to help you follow John's thought as it unfolds. The chapter divisions are based upon the points made by John, and not upon the rather arbitrary chapter divisions of the English versions.

Fourth . . . The text is the American Standard version of 1901.

Fifth . . . Following the text in each chapter there is a list of questions. They are not questions for which you will necessarily find a definite answer. They are designed to stimulate your imagination and open your mind to what John has written.

Sixth . . . The Paraphrase is by Rotherham. It will help you in your own study of the text.

Seventh . . . The Author's Translation was originally prepared to help him glean, from the epistle, thoughts that might have otherwise been overlooked in depending upon some other English version. It is hoped that it will also help the reader in the same way.

Eighth . . . Comments on the text are included as a study guide. They are limited and are not intended as an exhaustive commentary. Rather they are designed to stimulate the reader in his own study.

Ninth . . . At the end of each chapter is a set of review questions. These are intended to help the reader remember what he has read and to furnish "pegs" upon which to hang his own thoughts and those of the Apostle.

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND
IN ORDER TO STUDY I JOHN

1. Word (*logos*)

- a. The Greek *logos*, translated *Word* in the English version, meant something to the first century readers of I John that the modern English-speaking reader finds hard to grasp.
 - i. To the first century Jew, a *word* was a unit of energy. God said, and it was so. The *Word* was the master builder of the universe.
 - ii. The Greeks were also familiar with this term. To them the *Word* was the mind and reason upon which the entire creation was built. It was the *word* which made the fluxating, changing universe stable and dependable.
 - iii. Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, a philosopher and a contemporary of Jesus had much to say about the *word*. He reasoned that the *word* was God's instrument of creation. It was the imprint of God's mind upon matter. The *word* determined the course of the universe. Perhaps most important from a Christian point of view, Philo saw the *word* as the priest through whom God communicated with man.
- b. It is into this pre-Christian understanding of the *word* that John pours the rich elixir of Christian truth. In so doing, he incorporates all that is best in Jewish and Greek thinking on the subject. (See John 1:1-14)
 - i. The word was in the beginning, and so was eternal and uncreated.
 - ii. The word was with God. John's grammar (John 1:1) leaves no room for doubt. The word was *equal* with God.
 - iii. The word was *God*. That is, the word was *deity* rather than a created being.
 - iv. All things were made through Him. The word was what our scientists would refer to as "*the first cause*." He was what the modern liberal theologian, blinded by his inflated evaluation of his own scholarship, refers to as "*Ultimate Ground of Being*."
 - v. In Him, (the *word*), was *life*. (Demonstrated by the inability of the grave to hold Him.)

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND

- vi. The life, (which was in the *word*) was the *light* of men. This light was (and is) constantly coming into the world, and the darkness is unable to extinguish it. It is this light which distinguishes man from the animals.
- vii. The *word* became *flesh* and dwelt among us. Jesus was not God *and* man, or *in* man. He was God *as* man.

2. Incarnation

- a. In his final statement concerning the *word*, John introduces the idea expressed by our English word "incarnation." (John 1: 14)
- b. John goes one step beyond the philosophers. The *word* which they considered an impersonal force or influence, he introduces as a person.
- c. In this statement concerning the *word*, John also solves the dilemma of modern liberal theology. Jesus is not, as one theologian cynically put it, "A divine substance . . . plunged in flesh and coated with it like chocolate . . ." He did not come into flesh, nor take on flesh. The *word became* flesh!

3. Light

- a. The Greek word is *phos* and means light as the source of illumination as opposed to reflected light. It is the light of the sun rather than the reflected light of the moon.
- b. This light was never kindled, and hence never quenched. It is eternal.
- c. Everyone who has ever studied biology knows that there is a vital relationship between light and life.
- d. As in the physical, so in the spiritual. John says in the *word* was *life*, and life was the *light* of men. The word is the source of human life as the sun is the source of plant life.
- e. In the Graeco-Roman world in which John wrote and in which his readers lived, popular thought visualized two ways of existence: The way of darkness and death and the way of light and life. John makes one's relationship to the *Word* the test of one's position in the struggle between these two ways.

4. Gnosticism

- a. Gnosticism was the false teaching against whose influence John wrote.
- b. Gnosticism was a mixture of Oriental mysticism, Greek philosophy and Christian thought.

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND

- c. The practical effect of the Gnostic philosophy was to separate all spirit from all matter. The effect of Gnosticism on the Christian faith was two-fold.
 - i. It denied the incarnation. The *Word* which was spirit, and therefore good, could not become flesh which was matter, and therefore evil.
 - ii. It denied any personal guilt of sin on the part of the individual. After all, if the spirit of man is distinct from his body, then his spirit can scarcely be held accountable for what his body does.
4. Know
 - a. The gnostic claimed a special knowledge of truth. The word "gnostic" means "one who knows."
 - b. John used the word *know* in a way designed to prove that true knowledge comes from personal experience with Christ.
5. Truth
 - a. The Greek *aletheia* translated "truth" means "reality." The gnostic thought he had exclusive rights to reality.
 - b. John uses this word which means reality to describe the truth revealed in Christ.
 - c. The *word* is presented as the ultimate source of all reality.