

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS – CHAPTER SIX

The grace of God enables us to 'walk', to live the Christian life to the full, united in Christ, strong enough to stand up to waves and winds of false teaching, displaying our 'new clothes' of Christ-likeness. We can walk lovingly, with a light shining from us, carefully and wisely. We have seen how this can work out in marriage leading to a relationship in which we each value the other deeply and husbands are willing to love their wives so much they would die for them. And so it will get better and better as the years pass. Now Paul moved on the next step, the children.

Paul's instruction to children is very simple. They are to obey. The Greek word means 'listen under', in other words, 'listen and do it'. This word for obey is only used of our relationship with God and with His word, and then of children towards parents and slaves towards masters. It is not used of wives to husbands, people towards government or congregations towards pastors. Underlying obedience however is the instruction to everyone in 5:21 to submit, which as we have seen is about respect and value. This is to be true not only of children towards parents but of parents towards children. Attitude in Christ comes before any action. This is why Paul says 'obey...in the Lord'. He quoted from the Ten Commandments to emphasise this point. Honouring parents is about attitude and is to be lifelong. Becoming an adult takes away the need for obedience but not for honour. The promise in Exodus 20:12 was that it would go well and life would be long. It becomes clear now that God was promising eternal life and a quality of life not material prosperity or old age.(6:1-4)

Slaves who have discovered the grace of God are able to look past their masters, who may or may not treat them well, to their Master in heaven. Their 'fear and trembling' is not towards a man but towards Christ who alone we are to fear, but not be terrified of, because of His love for us.(Phil.2:12; Matt.10:28) Having learned submission, even towards someone who may not have earned respect, their response to orders will be from the heart towards the Lord within them, not outwardly to impress. They know that their true Master will treat them wonderfully well, so nothing really matters. Earthly masters who know the Lord Jesus will become conscious that they too are simply servants of their Master. When they learn submission in Christ it will occur to them that they and their slaves are just fellow servants and brothers with the same Father. Hence Christians in Europe and North America finally led the move to end slavery in the 19th century. When Paul sent Onesimus, the newly converted slave back to his Christian master Philemon, it was with a letter that introduced one brother, Philemon,(Philem. 1) to another brother, Onesimus.(Philem.16) It is hard to believe that in their new relationship Philemon kept Onesimus as a slave much longer. On the other hand there is no indication that Paul was encouraging Onesimus to rise up and rebel. What was true of 1st century masters and slaves will be equally true of 21st century bosses and workers. A modern work place where all of us have learned submission will be a caring, fruitful, enjoyable place to be.(6:5-9)

Paul reminded the Ephesians and us of what we are up against. We are inclined to look simply at the world around us which so often seems antagonistic or just indifferent to our message. Behind this human opposition from the world is the real enemy, the Devil, who is cunning, powerful, ruthless and the ultimate liar, and his demonic army. The Bible gives just a glimpse of the unseen battle in 'heavenly places'.(Dan.10:13-21) The important news is who won, the Lord Jesus.(Jn.16:33; I Jn.4:4) The big question is how can we share in His victory and stay on the winning side? The answer is in this next section, by putting on our spiritual armour piece by piece, the armour which was revealed to us in chapters 1-3.(6:10-13)

The first instruction was to put on the truth which, according to 1:13, was where our faith started from. The truth was to protect the loins, and therefore the stomach, which in the Roman culture was the seat of the emotions. Anxiety, from guilt and fear, is felt in our guts. Truth assures us that we are now at peace with God because of Jesus. The next item of armour was the breastplate which protects the heart. If our hearts are beating we are alive. The evidence of the life of God within is righteousness, His way of behaving.(4:24) Our feet before the motor car were the normal means of travel. Our reason for going out into the world rather than staying safely at home is the knowledge that we have spectacular news which everyone needs to hear. Paul quoted here from Isa.52:7 which immediately preceded Isaiah's amazing explanation of the cross of Christ, 700 years before it happened. The gospel of peace will change the relationships between people who had otherwise always been in conflict by making peace first with God.(2:11-17) All three of these pieces of armour had been described in Isa.59:17 to explain how the Redeemer Himself would be able to come into this world and save us.(6:14,15)

The shield was the one mobile piece of armour with which the soldier could handle attack on any area and from any direction. Faith had already been explained to us as our only response to truth,(1:15) which receives salvation,(2:8) which allows us constant access to God through Christ,(3:12) and which welcomes Him to be at home within us.(3:17) The helmet covered the head where most of us keep our brains with which we think. Grace allows us to know we are saved whereas if we depended on our performance under the Law, we would have to wait until the day of judgement to hear which way our case was decided. We have only one weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Jesus Himself demonstrated beautifully how to use it against the Devil when He was tempted in the wilderness.(Lk.4:4-12) The writer of Hebrews used the same image to describe just how the word would work in the human heart.(Heb.4:12) We are ready for anything.(6:16,17)

But how do I get dressed in my armour? By praying, thinking with God, talking with God about every promise He has made in His word. Notice the instruction, 'all prayer', 'at all times', 'with all perseverance' and 'for all the saints'. Real prayer is all His way, or nothing. It is linked here with petition, which means supplication, the attitude of the beggar whose own hands are empty. Of ourselves we have nothing to offer so we can only depend on Christ. Paul asked them to pray for him that he would be bold, unembarrassed in his presentation of the gospel. His boldness depended on his own faithfulness not their prayer, but if they prayed like this for Paul, how could they fail to be bold in their own witness?(6:18-20)

Paul's bond of love with the Ephesians was so strong, it was important not just to send this letter to them but to ask a good, trusted friend, Tychicus, to deliver it and to pass on personally his news and his feelings. Tychicus was from Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital, so he would be well known and trusted. His closing greeting drew together one last time in this book of superlatives Paul's favourite words, peace, love, faith and grace.(6:21-24)

TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

1. Review chapters 1-3 listing again the key consequences of being in Christ and having Christ in us. Put each of these consequences into your own words.
2. Now in chapters 4-6 detail each human situation being discussed. For each situation describe how your conclusions from chapters 1-3 will work out.
3. How then can we use the book of Ephesians to counsel struggling people?
4. Which phrase or verse in this book will you particularly recall in future years?