

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

The plan to bless us with everything heaven has to offer in Jesus Christ was magnificent. The ambition of Paul expressed in his prayer was that we should develop a real heart understanding of all that blessing. As part of God's answer to his own prayer Paul began, in chapter one, to teach the Ephesians again of the hope of God's plan, the riches of His grace and the surpassing greatness of His power, all possible because of where Jesus is now, back in charge in heaven with the Father. In chapter two he reminded them and us of why we need such blessing.

Until we trusted Christ we were dead, not physically or mentally, but spiritually. Since the day Adam and Eve told God in the Garden of Eden that they did not need Him to be godlike, all human beings except one have been born and lived without the Holy Spirit in their human spirit. Adam and Eve's choice to be independent of God was sin and led to them trespassing into moral territory where God did not want them to go. From then on three forces have dominated our lives. 'The world' of other people leads us into their twisted ways. 'The prince of the power of the air', the Devil, as the ruler of the world we live in, (Jn.12:31; I Jn.5:19; Eph.6:12) dominates our thinking through temptation because our first parents chose it that way. 'The lusts of our flesh' direct our behaviour and are the inevitable consequence of self in charge of our souls. While expressed very differently because of personality, upbringing and choices we all had the same problem and all faced the judgement of a holy God. We were in big trouble!(2:1-3)

God knew that there was only one solution to being dead. There was no point in repairing, redressing and repainting the dead like a funeral director. One thing only was needed, life. He made us alive with the life of Christ. His motive was love. His method was grace. His mission was mercy. God's grace was poured out in Jesus in super abundance, the 'surpassing riches of His grace'. He not only restored life to our spirits on earth by coming to live back in our human spirits, as He first planned us to be, but He placed us in heaven where Jesus already is. This leads us to the startling discovery that not only are we going to eternal life in heaven one day, but we already have eternal life within us and are already in heaven. It is not a matter of maybe, one day. It is a reality today. There are three things we need to realise about the grace of God. Firstly it must be individually received; the Bible calls this 'faith'. Secondly we cannot earn grace by our good behaviour. Thirdly faith in Christ results not only in salvation but in a new way of living, a new plan.(2:4-10)

But for whom was this amazing gift prepared? After reading the Old Testament it would be logical to expect that grace was God's method of correcting the way His chosen people, the Jews, had wandered off track and missed out on His best. Remarkably, Paul says, this was also His solution to the seemingly hopeless condition of the Gentiles, the rest of humanity. The Jews, 'the Circumcision', (so-called because of the Jewish practice according to the Law of Moses), had written the Gentiles, 'the Uncircumcision' off as being of no interest to their God. But God had every intention of bringing the Gentiles

also into a relationship with Him, not by getting them to behave like Jews, but by the blood of Christ, exactly the same answer as for His people, the Jews.(2:11-13)

The effect of this simple act is far reaching. The Jews can be at peace with God. The Gentiles can be at peace with God. If both enjoy His peace then they will be at peace with each other. In every human conflict there is one ultimate solution, peace, first with God through the blood of Christ, and then peace with each other. This will be true whether the conflict is between nations, or husband and wife, or between neighbours. To underline his message Paul quoted from Isa.57:17 where God was spelling out what the coming Messiah would give. 'Peace' has been the dream of ordinary people since the beginning. In Christ it can be a reality. But in the same passage Isaiah,(57:21) warned, 'there is no peace for the wicked.'(2:14-18)

As a consequence of the cross, every believer, Jew or Gentile, is part of the same nation of God, the same family of Christ, and the same building. No longer does God live in a temple building in Jerusalem but in a spiritual house in which there is room for all. The building is constructed on the teaching of the New Testament apostles, the Old Testament prophets and above all, the blood of Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. In Him there is no conflict but instead a wonderful harmony. And the building is still growing!(2:19-22)

#### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER THREE

1. Why did Paul call himself 'a prisoner of Christ Jesus'? How did Paul describe his position and responsibility as a minister? How was he trained for Christian ministry? How might this apply to us and our calling to ministry?(3:1-3)
2. What is the mystery to which Paul referred? Why had it been kept a secret? How had the secret now got out? How is the secret to be shared? What three privileges do the Gentiles have which they lacked before? How does knowing of these privileges help in daily life?(3:4-7)
3. Why did Paul refer to himself as 'the very least of all the saints'? Was he shorter than the other apostles? What had this view of himself forced Paul to discover? For what was all this grace to be used? Who are 'the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places'?(1:21; 6:12) How does our understanding of grace increase our boldness and confidence in prayer, when we or others close to us suffer?(3:8-13)
4. What, in your own words, was Paul praying for his readers? How was it an extension of his prayer in 1:15-23? What is necessary for Christ to dwell in our hearts? What above all are the effects of Him doing so? How can the love of Christ surpass knowledge? How is this another way of describing what it means to be filled with the Spirit?(3:14-20)
5. What examples can you recall of God doing so much more than you dared to ask or think in your own life? Who therefore deserves the credit for answered prayer?(3:21,22)