

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

We have enjoyed three chapters which just bubble with the excitement of knowing all that has been lavished upon us in Jesus Christ by a loving God who delights to pour out His grace. As we turn from our Bibles to the world in which we live and struggle, the big question is 'So what?'. The next three chapters introduce us to the adventure of discovering the outworking of grace in the church, society, marriage, the family, work and our mission in the world.

Paul's first concern was our unity as Christians. He was convinced that all we have in Christ could work out in practice so that we experience a peace and oneness between us. He was not urging us to become united but to work on maintaining the unity we already have because we are all part of Him. The love of Christ will show in humility which values others above ourselves, in gentleness which gives others space, in patience which allows them time, and in tolerance which accepts differences. Jesus Christ has one body, one Spirit, offers the same hope, based on the same faith in the same Father. All baptism expresses the same witness to the watching world.(4:1-6)

What resource has He given us to help this to remain a reality? There is a very simple answer – grace. Jesus descended to the earth and died for us so that He could be resurrected and ascend back to heaven to pour out His grace upon us. He gives us to each other as an expression of grace. We do not have a special gift; we are that gift. Apostles are pioneer missionaries; prophets are God's mouthpieces on earth; evangelists persuade people to believe the gospel; pastors who must also be teachers are shepherds to lead the flock to grass so that they can feed themselves. Each making his unique contribution, combines together to build Christians both individually and as Christ's one body. Unity is the result of spiritual growth by which Christ in us grows to full size. Children tend to fight. Mature men should not. Children are pushed around by wind and waves. Adults can withstand the currents and gales of false teaching. Together we are to speak the truth which brings about growth towards maturity, and we are to do so lovingly.(4:7-16)

Our behaviour before we became Christians had its origin in our thinking. Hard hearts left us ignorant and wandering around in futility like people lost in the dark. Such hard hearted thinking led to hard hearted behaviour, immorality and greed. There is no way such behaviour can be repaired. The only solution is to learn Christ as each part of the body makes his or her contribution in teaching the truth. The result can be a simple exchange like a complete change of clothing from our old rags of self centred behaviour to a beautiful new outfit of thinking and living, which is like Jesus because it is Jesus.(4:17-24)

The old clothes included lies. The new clothes speak the truth to the rest of the body of Christ. The old clothes were often a lasting anger when we did not get our own way. The new clothes include the ability to say the tough things which sometimes need to be said but without the bitterness which gives Satan great opportunity to divide us. If there is a problem between us it should be settled practically and emotionally today. The old

clothes justified stealing. The new clothes mean we are happy to work instead not just to provide for ourselves but for others. The old clothes used words which hurt and destroyed people in criticism. The new clothes only build others up by introducing them to grace. If we return to our old ways we cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit who is the seal of confirmation,(1:13) that we belong to Jesus.(4:25-30)

To sum up, the old clothes which came from a crooked heart, were expressed in angry, cruel words which divided. Our new clothes show a soft, forgiving heart because we have first been forgiven.(4:31,32)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER FIVE

1. How can we imitate God? What will imitating Him look like according to this section? What example is intended to inspire us? What two examples did Paul use of what this new 'walk' will look like? Why are the two issues he raises so destructive of this walk? How are we deceived about these problems in modern society?(5:1-7)
2. What is the second characteristic of our new walk? What qualities will be particularly effective? What effect will such a way of living have upon those around us? Why is it so important that this happens before we open our mouths? What choices do we need to be making all day, every day?(5:8-14)
3. What is the third aspect of our new walk? How would walking in the light help with this next step? Why is it difficult to be wise in the modern world? What choices did Paul list here? What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? What help can Christian music be in helping us to walk as God wants?(5:15-21)
4. What instruction did Paul give to Christian wives? Was he being tougher on them than the men? What instruction did he give to Christian husbands? What model of submission and love did he use? How does this model change our understanding of what he meant by both instructions? What effect will loving our wives in the way Paul described have upon them? How will following this plan for both partners fulfil God's original plan in marriage?(5:22-33)