

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS - PART THREE

The gospel is the good news that we can be right with God in heaven, and right before men on earth - by faith, which releases God's power.(1:1-17) The bad news is that all of us suffer from the same disease, ungodliness, which shows in various symptoms, unrighteousness, however hard we try to cover up and hide the truth from others. The symptoms are intellectual, religious and moral. All of us suffer from some of them. So far as God is concerned, all sin is equal, so all of us are equally guilty whichever symptoms we happen to have.(1:18-32)

We make three excuses for not accepting the bad news. We say God is not just because

1. Some people are worse than we are, at least according to our judgment of them.(2:1-10) God's answer is that our judgment of others shows that in our hearts, if not necessarily in our actions, we have just as big a problem as those we judge. Paul goes on to explain that we misinterpret God's patience and kindness with us as approval of the way we are. Judgment does not happen now, but after death, when God must eventually judge not only our actions but the rebellious attitude of our hearts which explains the way we behave. Judgment will lead to big trouble for the rebel and great joy for the one who trusts God. No-one is excluded from this simple choice.

2. Some people have not heard the gospel so it would not be right for God to judge them by the same standard He applies to those who have heard.(2:11-16) God's answer is that everyone knows something of God's way in his heart, because God put that knowledge there, as in chapter 1:18. God will judge us, not by what we don't know, but by what we do about what we do know. It will be our thinking that He will judge not just our actions. God is absolutely fair.

3. Some people are religious so they must be acceptable to God.(2:17-29) God's answer is that the more we know the greater our responsibility. Paul describes first the way the religious see themselves towards the world, as the ones with all the answers.(2:17-20) Then he tells how it really is, saying one thing but doing another.(2:21,22) Finally he makes a statement that would have upset his Jewish hearers enormously; their hypocrisy actually puts people off God rather than attracting them to Him!(2:23,24) He points out that what God desires is an attitude in the heart of repentance and faith, not simply outward observation of a tradition such as circumcision. Christianity is about God being pleased with us, not impressing men.(2:25-29)

Chapter three deals with a couple more excuses, pushes the point home even harder, and then begins to explain God's treatment for this universal and humanly incurable disease.

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER THREE

3:1-4 Q.1 What is the next excuse people make for rejecting the gospel? What is Paul's answer? How do we make the same excuse today?

3:5-8 Q.2 The last excuse is the silliest. What is it? Why does Paul not take it seriously? Do people still think like this today?

3:9-18 Q.3 Paul repeats in verse 9 his claim that everyone is suffering from the same disease, sin. He then quotes a whole series of Old Testament passages mainly from the Psalms. Look up these references in the OT and notice the context of each one. What two points is Paul proving? (3:10-12; 13-18) How can we use this section to help people who think they do not need Christ?

3:19-20 Q.4 What was the purpose of the Old Testament Law? Was it to divide people into those who had passed and those who had failed?

3:21-23 Q.5 If the Law cannot make us right with God, what other way is there? Did no-one pass God's examination?

3:24,25 Q.6 Three big words are used, justification, propitiation and redemption, What do they mean? How do these three ideas fit together to provide the solution to our problems?

3:26 Q.7 If being right with God is a gift, what do we have to do to receive it? Do we have to work for it? What common misunderstandings are there about this question? How do they affect our whole approach to Christian living?

3:27-30 Q.8 How are Jews saved? How are Gentiles saved? What is the difference?

3:31 Q.9 Well then, what was the point of the Old Testament Law?

3:19-31 Q.10 How does this passage deal with the problem of ungodliness? How can I be sure that God has dealt with my problem?