

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

The gospel as Paul has presented it to us in Romans 1-8 is simple and clear but radically different from any man made religious solution to the problem of how we can have a relationship with our Creator. Paul's claim is that the only way we can be fit for heaven is by faith as we accept Christ's death in our place on the cross.(1-4) His second claim is that the only way we can be fit to live on earth is also by faith in His risen life in us.(5-8) Because it is so different, it is harder for many to accept than we might suppose. If we have lingering doubts about the truth of the gospel as God's answer for everyone, we will lack the deep down conviction that allows Christ to change us from the inside. Our doubts centre around the justice of God, whether His gospel really treats us fairly. God in His patience, knowing how important it was to us to resolve these doubts, led Paul to digress for three chapters,(9-11) to settle these questions thoroughly before going on to show us what faith in Christ would look like in practice.

In chapter nine, the question first raised in 2:1-10 is expanded and dealt with more thoroughly. If becoming a Christian is based on God's choosing not on our merit, as we would have preferred to think, isn't that unfair? Does He choose some for heaven and others for hell? Did God, for example, choose Jews for salvation and Gentiles for damnation? Paul first reminds his readers how much he longed for the salvation of his Jewish brothers.(9:1-3) The Jews, he says, were incredibly privileged to be adopted as God's family, to have His presence among them, to have so much promised to them, to have the scriptures and finally to be the people into whom the Christ was born.(9:4-5) But tragically many had chosen not to benefit from those privileges.(9:6) To illustrate his point Paul refers to three pairs of people in the Old Testament.

First he asks about Isaac and Ishmael.(9:7-9) Did God have a plan only for Isaac? Though Isaac was to be the ancestor of Israel and so of Jesus, God still had a great plan for Ishmael.(Gen.21:18) Secondly Paul asks about Jacob and Esau.(9:10-13) Did God only have a plan for Jacob? On the contrary it was Esau who chose to sell his privileged position as the first-born for the sake of a meal?(Gen.25:32-34) Thirdly he asks us to think about Moses and Pharaoh.(9:14-18) Was it not unfair that Moses was chosen to deliver Israel out of slavery, and Pharaoh was chosen to be the bad guy? On the contrary, no-one in history had a better opportunity to see the goodness and power of God than Pharaoh did. It was Pharaoh who first hardened his heart against God, not the other way round.(Exod.7:13) The fact that God later used him as a warning to others of the terrible consequence of defying God does not alter the wonderful opportunity he had to hear and see God at work.

Next Paul goes back to an Old Testament illustration which was popular with Isaiah and Jeremiah. (Isa.29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer.18:6) The potter and his lump of clay describe our relationship with God. Patiently the potter works on the clay reworking it over and over again towards the plan in his mind. The clay does not decide what the plan should be nor criticise the potter's work. So it is to be with God. He can make exactly what He chooses of our lives. But consider for a moment - what potter ever chose to work on a lump of clay to make rubbish fit only for destruction? Did God ever create a human being for whom He did not have a unique plan? Sadly He knew that many would refuse the plan and resist the work of His hands, but the plan was there.(9:19-23) God had plans for Gentiles just as much as for Jews.(9:24)

Paul again takes us back into the Old Testament to make his point. He refers first to Hosea,(2:23; 1:10) and then to Isaiah,(10:22; 1:9; 13:19) to remind us how again and again God, our Potter, made an amazing job of most unpromising lumps of clay.(9:25-29) Whether Gentile or Jew the

only way to become the vessel the Potter planned us to be is by faith that lets His hands do the work.(9:30-33)

Chapter ten takes up the next problem of Romans 2:11-16. Isn't God unfair because some people have never heard the gospel, yet all are to be judged if they haven't trusted Christ?

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER TEN

10:1 Q.1 How is the beginning of this chapter very similar to the beginning of the last one? Why does Paul begin each discussion of God's justice and mercy with this same thought?

10:2,3 Q.2 How does this section answer the question of the person who says that being sincere about our faith matters more than what we believe? What mistake do those who do not know about the gospel always make in their thinking about how to be right with God?

10:4,5 Q.3 How does the Old Testament show the futility of trying to live up to God's standard? What according to this section is the alternative?

10:6-10 Q.4 When righteousness seems impossible, what wrong views do people have as to what would be necessary to make it possible? Again what workable alternative do we have in the gospel? What two things do we have to do to be saved?(Mark 1:15; Acts 2:37,38)

10:11-13 Q.5 How do these three verses explain what verses 9 and 10 mean by believing and confessing? To whom do we have to confess Christ to be saved?

10:14,15 Q.6 Having explained that there is only one way for Jew or non-Jew to come to God what problem does Paul now foresee? What are we to do about those who have not heard? Who then is unjust, God or me, if some have not heard the gospel?

10:16,17 Q.7 Rather than making excuse about those who have never heard the gospel what should be our real concern? How can we help someone to believe in Christ?

10:18 Q.8 This verse quotes from Psalm 19. What are the two messages of that Psalm? How does Psalm 19 help us to answer our problem about God's justice and those who have never heard?

10:19-21 Q.9 What effect should Gentiles believing in Christ have had on the Jews? How can we make other people 'jealous' for God? Once again Paul has shown that the real problem is not that God is unjust if some have not heard as much as others. What really is the problem?