

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

We have seen Paul pause between chapter 8 where he talked of the changes on the inside when Christ lives in us, and chapter 12 where he begins to talk of the changes that will come on the outside because of His Spirit within us. His concern is our hang-ups about the justice of God. He examines further the three questions previously raised in chapter 2. In chapter 9 the problem was whether God is unjust to choose to save some. Does God choose others so that He can condemn them? As we have seen the key illustration which makes everything in this controversial issue clear is that of the potter and the clay. Who is in charge, the potter or the clay? So God is sovereign. But on the other hand does a real potter ever choose a lump of clay to make rubbish? Doesn't God always have a great though unique plan for each one He creates? The problem is not that God is unmerciful. We are the ones with the problem if we do not make our hands available to our Maker, lovingly to mould the lives of others towards His purpose for them.

In the same way in chapter 10 the problem is with us, not God. Paul begins with another reminder of how much he loved his Jewish brothers despite their rejection of him.(10:1,2) Their problem is that they have tried to be right with God by their own effort, which even their own law said was impossible, instead of accepting Christ's gift of His own righteousness.(10:3-5) Salvation does not require us to try to bring Christ down from heaven or up from the grave but simply requires us to believe His word.(10:6-8) All that is required of us is that we confess our sin to God,(I Jn.1:9) and trust Him in our hearts.(10:9,10) Absolutely everyone comes to Him the same way whether Jew or Gentile.(10:11-13) So faith depends on hearing the word, and hearing depends on someone coming to preach to us. It is a beautiful thing when one person comes to tell another the word of God. (10:14,15) But here is the problem - what about those who never heard? Will God judge them the same if hearing is the only way to believing?(10:16,17)

Paul answers the question by taking us back to Psalm 19 which says that there are two ways by which God speaks to man, by His creation and by His word? Both can be the basis of our faith in Him.(Rom.1:20) So everyone has heard by one means or another.(10:18) The mystery is that God spoke a great deal to people like the Jews but many did not believe and to others He seemingly said so little and yet they came to trust Him.(10:19-21) He hoped that Gentiles trusting Him would make the Jewish people jealous to know Him as well as they did. Again the problem is not with God being unmerciful but with us who have not always made our mouths available for Him to speak through so that others might believe Him too.

In chapter 11 Paul takes up again the question he first raised in chapter 2:17-29. Should not the Jews be exempt from the verdict that all are ungodly? Isn't God unjust towards this race who had spent over a thousand years being religious only to be judged like heathen Gentiles? By now you can guess what his answer will be!

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER ELEVEN

11:1-4 Q.1 Paul's first concern is that we should not lump all Jews together from a spiritual point of view. What Old Testament example is he using to make his point? What was its context? How does this help us when we feel alone in our Christian witness?

11:5-10 Q.2 What then is the distinction to be made among Jews in their relationship with God? What does he mean by 'the rest were hardened'? Aren't the two Old Testament examples in 11:8

and 11:9,10 showing that God is unjust in the way He chooses? Compare verse 8 with Matt.13:13-16, and look up the context of verses 9,10 in Psalm 69.

11:11-15 Q.3 Paul suggests a different view of what God will accomplish through the Jews' apparent rejection of Christ. What is it? Can people really become Christians through jealousy?

11:16-24 Q.4 What two illustrations does Paul now use to support his argument? What understanding of the problem does each illustration contribute? What similarities are there between the second illustration and John 15:1-6? Does the idea of branches being broken off mean that we can lose our salvation? What is here described as the root of all sin? What then is the advantage of being a Jew or, as far as we are concerned, having a Christian background?

11:25-32 Q.5 What is the spiritual future of Israel? How should knowing this change our attitude to the Jewish people? What does verse 29 mean to us? Once again Paul demonstrates that this question should not be about God's justice but about His mercy. How does he prove this point?

11:33-36 Q.6 What is the real problem of the person who thinks that God is unjust for this or any other reason? What similarity do you notice between this passage and Romans 9?

11:1-36 Q.7 Responding to God's mercy will change what we do with our hands,(chap.9) and our mouths,(chap.10) What aspect of us does chapter 11 suggest will be changed when we finally grasp that God, far from being unjust, is amazingly merciful?