

## Small Group Bible Study Questions

- A) Read Romans 9:14-22. What are the different questions and emotions a passage like this brings to your mind? Paul (the author of Romans) seems to say that when we have questions, we ought to just shut our mouths (9:20) because we are the created, not the creator. Does this strike you as being a bit anti-intellectual? Does it seem like it means we should just accept what the Bible says without question and move on? What do you and your group think?
- B) Take some time in your group to discuss the hiddenness of God. How does the hiddenness of God reveal who He is? Do you ever wish that God was not hidden? What might happen if God decided to quit hiding Himself?
- C) Does God's love force God into certain actions? In other words, is God's love the thing which dictates God's will (understanding that they work in union, not in opposition, to one another)? Why do you think Paul refers to humanity as "vessels of wrath" (Romans 9:22)? How does all of this work together for the glory of God (read Romans 9:23-33).
- D) Since it would seem that God is calling the shots (we are just spiritual pottery), how much responsibility do we (or anyone) bear for accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ?
- E) Romans 10:8-13 is one of the best explanations of what it takes for a person to receive Jesus Christ (you should read it). In the midst of God's choice, there is the reality of human responsibility to respond to God. We call it a "free choice," but really it is either slavery to sin or slavery to freedom in Christ (Romans 6:17-19). *On this side of Heaven*, what is our responsibility when it comes to sharing about the Great News of Jesus Christ? Are you doing this, or are you guilty of fearing the "approval of men" (John 12:42-43)? Share names of those who need Jesus that might be connected to your small group. Pray that God would reach them (have confidence that He really is in control), and pray that you would have the courage to tell them about how great Jesus really is!

# Get Outta Control!

Long Beach Alliance Church • June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**FOR THEY LOVED THE APPROVAL OF MEN  
RATHER THAN THE APPROVAL OF GOD.  
~JOHN 12:43 (NASB)**

### 1) The Light Begins To Dim...

- A) In a resigned response to the people who have just misunderstood the voice of God from Heaven about Him (John 12:28-34), Jesus Christ implores the people to "believe in the Light" (12:35-36).
- B) Ominously, Jesus revisits the metaphor of Light vs. darkness, noting that the Light will not be with much longer (12:35-36).
- C) With these final words of Jesus, He mysteriously leaves the scene and "is hidden" from the people\* (12:36b). Amazingly the Light has begun to dim, it has been hidden (by God!) from the people!

\* The word for "hidden" (ἐκρύβη) is often taken by commentators to be in the middle voice, despite the fact that it is written in the passive voice. The critical difference is that in the middle voice, Jesus becomes the source of His own hiddenness (e.g. NASB, ESV, NIV, KJV -- "He hid Himself"). In the passive voice, God becomes the source of Jesus' hiddenness (e.g. NKJV -- "He was hidden from them"). The emphasis of the passage, of course, is on God's sovereignty and predeterminate power. In my opinion, it stands to reason that the passive voice should be given favor at this juncture, despite the awkward vocabulary, because of God's voice (John 12:28) and clear intentionality (John 12:38-41) in the surrounding context. Thus, we see the hand of God hiding the Light from the people, a clearer connection to the following passage (12:38-41), and clearer connection to God glorifying Himself amongst the Gentiles in the future (12:28). It is God who hides and reveals the Light!

## 2) Did I Read That Correctly? God Hid The Light?!

- A) Just to clarify the point that God was doing the hiding of Jesus Christ, John quotes two passages from Isaiah (written around the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.) which clarify and emphasize God's sovereign control (12:37-41).
  
- B) At first reading, we often feel that God must be cold and heartless. How could a God who loves us (John 3:16), be the same God who "hardens" a heart? How could God blind anyone's eyes from seeing the Light of the world?

## 3) Is God Really In Control? Or Are You?

- A) Human responsibility is always at work in compatibility w/ God's sovereignty! Did mankind choose to reject the Light? Did God choose to harden mankind (in this case, the Jews) from seeing the Light? The answer to both is -- YES!
  
- B) We live in a remarkable mystery where God actually holds us responsible for our actions, while still being the "cause" of all things in the universe. Both are true, **even though only God understands how.**

† I use the term "sovereignty" to mean that God is supremely powerful, He is the first cause of all things, all things hold together because of Him and with Him, all things are possible. It is out of this biblical belief that John is teaching in this passage that the fate of all men has been ordained by God. This is not an arbitrary choosing without any sense of justice, but a judicial choosing which is perfect in its justice. God's sovereignty was always a source of hope and solace for the readers of Scripture who were often in political situations where their families, their futures and their livelihoods were completely out of their control. This is a very different setting than modern American society, where persecution and genuine difficulty because of faith in Jesus Christ is virtually absent. I believe it is harder for Americans to appreciate the sovereignty of God in the practical absence of persecution and opposition. In fact, God's sovereignty is more of a spirited (and sometimes divisive) debate amongst Christians than a hope and way of understanding the perfect plan and goodness of God. We must fight this tendency to attempt understanding God as a math problem to be mastered, and rather recognize God as completely sovereign.

- C) Remember that God's hardening is "judicial," not arbitrary. God does not harden those who are morally good or even morally neutral. God hardens those who are guilty (Romans 3:23)!
  
- D) God's sovereignty is reason for hope -- it is GOOD NEWS! Think about this, God calls on us to pray to Him, He tells us that He is in control of all things and that if we will pray for anything in union with the purposes of Christ, it will be done (John 14:12-14)! Why pray if He's not really sovereign?
  
- E) God's hardening always reveals His purposes of redemption for people (cf. Pharaoh in Egypt/Redemption of the Jews). In this case, the hardening of the Jews revealed God's plan for redemption of the Gentiles (Romans 9-11).

## 4) In The "Light" Of God's Sovereignty, How Should We Live?

- A) The sovereignty of God stands in ironic contrast to the fears and worries of man (John 12:42). Highly educated and influential men who knew the prophecies of Isaiah better than any of us, feared following Christ because of what they would lose.
  
- B) The motives of our hearts must be to follow and honor God and not any other person or thing (12:43). We have an audience of ONE, God and God alone! Responding to the sovereignty of God means following Christ completely, no matter the consequences!