

Lesson 33 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 3:8

Romans 3:8 — And why not do evil that good may come? — as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

With verse 8, we have the final objection that Paul deals with in this brief interlude between verse 2 and verse 9. Here is a paraphrase of the objections we have seen so far, including this new one here in verse 8:

“Paul, according to this gospel of yours, God used our sin as his occasion to bless the entire world with the Messiah. But, if that is true, then how can God condemn us for that sin? In fact, how can we even be called sinners? **And shouldn't we just sin more and more so that God can bless the world more and more?**”

And, again, Paul is not setting up straw-man arguments here. These were real objections made by real people. We know that for sure from verse 8 because Paul uses the phrase “some people.” But we also know that real people were making this final objection in verse 8 because Paul will return to it again in Romans 6.

Romans 6:1-2 — What shall we say then? **Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

And what can we say about this objection to Paul's message?

We can certainly say that the objection is meritless. Paul proves that right here, and Paul will prove that again later in chapter six.

But we can say more than that. This objection was not just false; it was also slanderous. This objection did not arise out of a calm academic discussion — but instead it arose out of a slanderous attack against the Apostle Paul.

And this slander is not the only such attack. In fact, when we look at the ministry of Paul, what we find is a constant barrage of slander and criticism from both inside and outside the church.

How many New Testament passages refer, either directly or indirectly, to the criticism and slander that Paul faced while proclaiming the gospel? I found 31 such passages, and they are all shown on the Handout for Lesson 33. Some of these passages describe the criticism itself, while others describe Paul's reaction to the criticism or Paul's defense of himself.

And we should note that over a third of these 31 passages are found in just two books — the two letters to the church in Corinth, which was the very city from which Paul was writing this letter to the Romans. Paul was not only very familiar with criticism, but he was very recently familiar with it.

I think we can learn a lot from Paul's example when it comes to criticism and slander.

First, I think we can say that it is unavoidable. Some amount of criticism will be experienced by everyone who purports to teach the word of God, although thankfully for most of us not to the level experienced by Paul. And Jesus, our perfect example, was also criticized and slandered — even to the point of the Pharisees attributing his miracles to Satan. And we know that a servant is not above his mas-

ter — we should expect the same sort of treatment from the world when it comes to criticism and slander.

John 15:18-19 — If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Second, in responding to criticism, we need to determine whether the criticism is valid. Paul also did his fair share of criticizing directed at others — but Paul’s criticism was always valid. Those criticized by Paul needed to heed that criticism from the Apostle and not dismiss it. And we should do the same when the criticism we receive is valid. And how do we know whether the criticism is valid? We open God’s word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 — All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training** in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Third, we need to make sure that criticism and slander do not derail us from proclaiming the word of God, which is usually the goal of the critic or the slanderer. They want to shut us up, but we need to make sure they are not successful in doing that. If we change or soften our message in response to criticism and slander, then we are not following Paul’s example.

Acts 20:27 — For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Fourth, we need to recognize that criticism can have a good side. Criticism can be a good sign that you are doing something right, depending on who is doing the criticizing.

Luke 6:26 — Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

And fifth, at least in some cases, we should recognize that criticism is better than indifference and apathy. Why? Because, at least with the criticism, people are still thinking about religious issues. People don't bother to criticize what they don't care anything about. At least with criticism, Christ is still being proclaimed.

Philippians 1:18 — What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

Moving on, I think we can see something about Paul's personality here in verse 8. I think we can see Paul's biting sense of humor. And, yes, I think we also see that humor elsewhere, but verse 8 is a perfect example of it.

Look at that final phrase — “their condemnation is just” — and remember that Paul is dictating this letter. We have the words that Paul spoke, but we don't have a record of the manner in which he spoke those words.

Here, for example, which word do we think Paul emphasized? “Their CONDEMNATION is just?” Or perhaps, “their condemnation is JUST?” I don't think it was either of those. Instead, I think it was this: “THEIR condemnation is just!”

In other words, I think Paul is saying, let's assume those critics are right — that God cannot condemn us for sin, and that we cannot be called sinners. Even so, when it comes to these slanderers, THEIR condemnation is still just! Even if they were correct that there was not another sinner anywhere in the world — they would still be sinners! THEIR condemnation is just! (While the humor in verse 8 is not quite as biting as Galatians 5:12, I think verse 8 still belongs on the list!)

Romans 3:9

Romans 3:9 — What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,

As we said earlier, verse 9 continues Paul's thought back in verse 2. Verses 3-8 in between were a brief diversion during which Paul dealt with objections to his message. We can think of verses 3-8 as being surrounded by parentheses. Here in verse 9, Paul picks up where he left off in verse 2.

But before we get to the message of verse 9, let's look at a textual issue about verse 9.

I have several copies of the English Standard Version. One of them was printed in 2001, and here is what I find when I look up Romans 3:9 in that 2001 ESV Bible:

Romans 3:9 (ESV 2001) — What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged

that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under **the power of** sin, ...

But when I look up the same verse in another copy of the ESV published in 2002, here is what I find:

Romans 3:9 (ESV 2002) — What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ...

What's going on? What caused the text to change in the ESV between 2001 and 2002? Why did it change? And what else changed?

The answer is that, in 2002, the publishers of the ESV made an unannounced revision to their original 2001 text to correct verses where they believed “that a mistake had been made in translation.”

Romans 3:9 was on that list, and I agree that the 2001 version needed correction. What Paul said in verse 9 is that they are under sin, not that they are under *the power of* sin. The phrase “the power of” is not in the Greek text. I agree with their change to that verse — and (if they had asked me) I would have suggested that they make a few more corrections that were not on their list!

And, in fact, more changes and corrections have been made. In fact, the ESV has been revised five times since the original 2001 publication — in 2002, in 2007, in 2011, in 2016, and in 2025.

Were the changes they made all correct changes? We would need to check each one individually, but it is interesting to note that there were a few changes that were later changed back, which doesn't give me great faith in their process!

The lesson for us (once again) is that we should use several different English translations in our study of God's word — and maybe even several different editions of the same translation.

Now, back to verse 9, what is Paul saying here? Back in verses 1-2, Paul told us that the Jews had advantages in every way. And so now in verse 9, Paul asks the natural follow-up question: Are we Jews any better off?

The answer is immediate — no, not at all. The answer was not, yes, but only a little bit — but the answer was no, not at all.

Yes, the Jews had great advantages — and those advantages no doubt made them better off in some way — otherwise they could not have been called advantages. But when it comes to making the Jews better off with regard to anything that matters — the answer is no, not at all. When it comes to salvation, the Jews are no better off at all than the Gentiles.

And why is that? Paul answers that question next — “for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”

What have we been saying all along is the central message of Romans 1-3? That the Jews and the Gentiles are in the same boat. Although Paul doesn't use the word “boat,” that central message is precisely what Paul just said here in verse 9 — “for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”

All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. All, both Jews and Greeks, are in the same boat. All, both Jews and Greeks, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no distinction. There is no partiality. There is no difference at all.

Romans 3:9 is the central message of Romans 1-3, although verse 9 is not the only place in Romans 1-3 where Paul tells us that central message. Paul will say it again in verse 23.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both Jew and Greek — and everyone needs that salvation because everyone has sinned. We are all in the same boat when it comes to sin and salvation. We all have the same problem, and we all need the same solution. There is no partiality. There is no distinction. There is no difference.

That sounds simple — and it is — but it is surprising how many people forget that simple truth later when they get to Romans 9-11. Many read those later chapters of Romans and think they see different paths to salvation for the Jews and for the Gentiles. But is that what we see here? No, it is not. We all have the same problem, and we all need the same solution. “Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all.”

Paul has now made that point several times in several ways — explaining and proving each step along the way. And, of course, Paul was speaking the inspired words of God — not the word of Paul, but the word of God (1 Corinthians 14:37). And so we might think that would be enough for Paul — time to move on to the next point after God has spoken.

But that is not what Paul does. Paul does not just say it and move on — Paul says it and then proves it from the word of God.

And we should notice that Paul did that even when he was himself speaking the word of God! How much more must we always do that ourselves when we are speaking our own words!

We must always support whatever we say with chapter and verse. Anytime a Bible teacher asks us to take his word for something, we should do what the Bereans did — examine the Scriptures ourselves to see if those things are so (Acts 17:11). But hopefully the teacher has done that same check himself. Any teacher who fails to properly prepare is walking in a minefield (James 3:1).

Here Paul does that for us — he gives us many scriptures to prove his point that we are all under sin.

Romans 3:10a

Romans 3:10a — as it is written:

What is the source of authority when it comes to questions about God? Is it the preacher? Is it the teacher? Is it an elder? Is it some member of our family? Is it some commentary written by the famous brother so and so? Is it ourselves and what we have always thought and what we have always taught? Is it the Holy Spirit somehow speaking to us or leading us or nudging us or teaching us or guiding us apart from the written word of God?

No. None of that is our source of authority. Paul gives us the only source of authority right here — “as it is written.”

If anyone could have gotten away with just saying something and not backing up what he said with chapter and verse, it would have been

Paul. In fact, what Paul was saying was itself chapter and verse (2 Peter 3:16)! And it was not Paul who was speaking, but the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul (Matthew 10:20). But Paul still gives us chapter and verse — as it is written!

And for those who claim authority from the Holy Spirit, perhaps they should note that the Holy Spirit did not speak on his own authority!

John 16:13 — When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, **for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak,** and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

It is written! That is the only source of authority for us today. If we want to prove something about the Bible, the Bible is what we must use to do that. It is written!

I like what Franklin Camp wrote about this issue in the introduction of his book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption*. I don't agree with everything in that book, but I certainly agree with this.

The subject of the Holy Spirit is one that I have been interested in from the time that I started preaching. One of the first errors that I had to meet when I began preaching was the denominational claim that the Holy Spirit worked directly and apart from the Word of truth. This is one of the basic doctrines of the denominational world. The teaching that the Spirit works directly and apart from the truth strikes at the very foundation of the authority of the Scriptures. This doctrine opens the door for the claims of all false teachers from Joseph Smith and Oral Roberts to Billy Graham. If one is led directly by the Spirit apart from the truth, then he does not need the Bible, nor indeed can he be expected to follow the Bible.

“This is one of the basic doctrines of the denominational world.” And yet we sometimes hear that same denominational language in the church today about being led by the Spirit or guided by the Spirit or being directed by the Spirit apart from the Bible.

We need to be very clear on this point. We need to present a consistent message when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit — and our message must be firmly grounded in what the word of God teaches us on that subject.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4:1 that the Spirit speaks expressly — and we should speak expressly ourselves when we speak about the Spirit. If we are unclear about the role of the Holy Spirit, then we should not be surprised when we see that there is a great deal of confusion in the church about that subject. We can't be clear about something we don't understand ourselves. We can't teach what the Bible says if we don't know what the Bible says.

Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that the Scriptures make us complete and equipped for every good work. Now is that true or is that not true? Complete and equipped for every good work?

And if that is true, then what does that truth tell us about the notion that the Holy Spirit is somehow speaking to us or leading us or prodding us apart from the written word of God? Either the Bible makes us complete or it does not — and Paul says it makes us complete.

Now, let's look at the evidence that Paul uses from the word of God to establish his central point in this section of his letter — that we are all in same boat when it comes to sin.

Romans 3:10b-12

Romans 3:10b-12 — “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

This quotation is found twice in the Old Testament in almost identical passages from Psalm 14 and Psalm 53:

Psalm 14:1-3 — The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, **they do abominable deeds**; there is none who does good. **The LORD** looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all **turned aside**; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Psalm 53:1-3 — The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, **doing abominable iniquity**; there is none who does good. **God** looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all **fallen away**; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

So, which one of those Psalms is Paul quoting here — Psalm 14 or Psalm 53?

The short answer is that we don’t know for sure, and it doesn’t really matter given that the two passages are almost identical. But, as you know, whenever there is a short answer, there is also always a long answer to go with it!

The long answer comes from something very unusual in the Septuagint (which, as we recall, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible from around 250 BC).

The first thing to note about the Septuagint when you are looking at the Psalms is that the numbering is different. The Septuagint combines a few Psalms into one, and splits a few Psalms into two. The result is that most of the Psalm numbers in the Septuagint are off by one, which is the case for Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 — in the Septuagint, Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 are instead Psalm 13 and Psalm 52.

But that is not the very unusual thing I have in mind. Instead, we need to focus on what the Septuagint does with Psalm 14 — and it does a lot more than just renumber it!

Psalm 14:1-3 [Psalm 13:1-3 in LXX] — *The foolish said in his heart, “There is no God.” They destroyed and were abhorred in their practices. There is no one doing goodness; there is not even one. 2 The Lord looked out from the heavens upon the sons of humans, to see if there is one who understands or one who seeks out God. 3 All turned aside together. They became useless. There is not one doing goodness; there is not even one. **Their throat is an opened grave. With their tongues they have dealt treacherously with one another. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are quick to pour out blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and they know not the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes.***

If we compare that translation of Psalm 14 with what we read earlier from the ESV, we find a very close correspondence through the beginning of verse 3 in the Septuagint. But then the Septuagint inserts a lengthy block of text that is not found in the ESV text of Psalm 14.

That is unusual, but it becomes really unusual when we look at what was added to Psalm 14 in the Septuagint — what was added is almost identical to what Paul quotes after Psalm 14 right here in Romans 3:10-12.

Romans 3:13-18 — “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” 14 “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Does the Septuagint do the same thing with Psalm 53? No. That block of text is found in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 14, but it is not found in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 53.

This would seem to be a smoking gun. Given that the Septuagint translation was created around 250 BC, this would seem to answer our question of what Paul was quoting here in Romans 3. It seems as if Paul was quoting the Septuagint translation of Psalm 14, including the large block of text that the Septuagint added to verse 3.

And there would be nothing particularly troublesome with that because, as we will soon see, all of that added material is found elsewhere in the Bible. The Septuagint did not invent the added material; it just copied it from other verses in the Bible.

But is that what happened? Is our smoking gun really a smoking gun? The answer is probably not.

Most scholars believe that the added material in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 14 was added, not before, but after Romans was writ-

ten, and was, in fact, copied from Romans 3. As early as the third century, Origen identified the added text as not being originally present in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 14.

I think that view is the better view. I think the extra material in the Septuagint is downstream of Paul, not upstream. And so that brings us back to our short answer — we really don't know whether Paul was quoting Psalm 14 or Psalm 53. He could have had either or even both in mind given that the quoted portions are so similar.

Let's turn our attention now to the text of the quotation.

Romans 3:10b-12 — “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

We haven't said much about Calvinism lately, but we must return to that subject here. Why? Because, as it turns out, this quotation from the Psalms is used as a proof text by Calvinists.

“No one does good.” The Calvinists say that means just what it says — no one does good — no one, not ever, nothing good at all at any time. For example, someone might think that he or she is being kind to someone else, but that is not true. No one can ever be kind to anyone else all on their own. It is not possible. Why? Because no one does good. No one — not ever.

And if you don't believe that is what the Calvinists actually teach, let me quote one directly:

“Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit people cannot exhibit this fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). They have no inner spiritual capacity whereby they can normally and automatically exercise genuine kindness toward others. Instead sin causes them to be selfish and self-centered.”

Is that what this Psalm means? Is that what Paul means when he quotes this Psalm? No. It is not.

And we can prove that simply by identifying someone in the Bible who was kind to someone else absent any help at all from the Holy Spirit. There are many such examples, but one example will do — and we can find such an example in Paul’s trip to Rome.

Acts 28:2 — The native people showed us **unusual kindness**, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.

What’s that? Unusual kindness? How could these native people show such kindness to Paul if those Calvinists are right when they argue that no one apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit can ever be kind to anyone else? The answer, of course, is that those Calvinists are completely wrong — and Acts 28:2 proves it, as do many other verses.

But I think we can find even stronger evidence than that. I think we can find evidence showing both that the Calvinists are completely wrong and also what Paul means here in Romans 3. And this stronger evidence comes from something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:11 — If you then, who are **evil**, know how to give **good** gifts to your children, how much more will

your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Calvin says that we are all evil and incapable of doing anything good on our own, but Jesus says that evil people can do good things. We just read it.