

Lesson 34 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 3:10-12, Continued

Romans 3:10-12 — As it is written: “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.”

When we ended last week, we had started looking at the first Old Testament passage quoted by Paul as evidence for his statement in verse 9, “that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”

And last week we noted that the Calvinists use this first quotation from Psalm 14:1-3 to argue that man is incapable of doing anything good absent the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We even quoted one Calvinist who said that no one is capable of being genuinely kind absent the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

But we looked at a single instance from the life of Paul to prove the opposite — the native people in Acts 28:2 showed Paul “unusual kindness” during his trip to Rome. The Calvinists would tell us that their kindness was not genuine kindness — but that is not what the Bible says.

That event from the life of Paul is strong evidence against the Calvinist view, 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. “If you then, who are **evil**, know how to give **good** gifts to your children.”

What is Paul’s point here in Romans 3? Is it that evil people can do nothing good? We know that is not Paul’s point. How do we know that?

First, we know that is not Paul’s point because it is wrong — Jesus just told us that evil people can do good things.

But second, we know that is not Paul’s point because Paul would have no reason to make such a point here. Paul is quoting these verses to show that everyone has sinned. Paul is not trying to show that everything we have ever done is a sin. Instead, Paul is showing that we have all done at least one thing that is a sin.

In short, Paul is not trying to show that I can never do anything good — that point (even if true, which it is not) would be much more than Paul needs to show. All Paul needs to show is that I have sinned once — and Paul has now shown that for both Jew and Gentile.

So what then does Psalm 14 mean? Simple — it means that we are all sinners. It means that we have all broken God’s law. It means that none of us is righteous — we are all lawbreakers. It means that we are not seeking God, but we are seeking ourselves. It means that we

have turned away from God. We have become worthless and vain. It means we are not good, but we are evil — we are all sinners. That is our condition apart from Christ. That is the problem we all have. That is why we all need the solution to that common problem.

Paul will soon give us a perfect summary of what Psalm 14 is telling us: we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

And, here is the thing, one sin is enough for me to fall short of the glory of God. One sin is all it takes for me to be a sinner. Paul does not need to show that we have never done **anything** good. He has to show only that we have not done **everything** good. And this Psalm quoted by Paul proves that.

It is amazing how many times the Calvinists read a verse in the Bible and then say “not really” (or “not genuinely,” which is just another way of saying “not really”).

- 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God does not want **anyone** to perish, but instead wants **everyone** to repent, but the Calvinists tell us that “anyone” and “everyone” do not **really** mean anyone and everyone.
- John 3:16 tells us that **whoever** believes in the Son of God should not perish but have eternal life, but the Calvinists tell us that “whoever” does not **really** mean whoever.
- Revelation 22:17 says “and **whosoever** will, let him take the water of life freely,” but the Calvinists tell us that “whosoever” does not **really** mean whosoever.

- The Bible tells us in Acts 8:13 that Simon **believed**, but the Calvinists tell us that Simon did not **really** believe.
- The Bible tells us in Acts 28:2 that the native people were **kind**, but the Calvinists tell us that the native people were not **really** kind.

But if you told me that something was true, and I responded “not really,” how would you take my response? I know how I would take it — I would take it to mean that you think what I said is not true, but is instead false. That is what “not really true” means. If something is not really true, then it is false. “Not really true” is a polite way of calling someone a liar.

And so the Calvinists may couch it in all sorts of vague language, but what they are saying is that Simon did not believe even though the Bible says that Simon did believe, and they are saying that the native people were not kind even though the Bible says the native people were kind (in fact, unusually kind!).

And all of this is from the same bunch of dispensationalists who love to tell us that they take everything in the Bible literally! Do they really?

Back to our text, let’s pause to look at a difficulty with Paul’s argument. Paul is using this quotation from Psalm 14 as evidence that no one is righteous, and yet Psalm 14 itself refers to the righteous.

Psalm 14:5 — There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the **righteous**.

So was Psalm 14 saying that everyone is unrighteous? Or was Psalm 14 instead saying that some people are unrighteous, and they can make life difficult for those of us who are righteous?

I think when we read Psalm 14 we have to admit that it is not saying that everyone on earth is unrighteous given that Psalm 14:5 refers to the righteous. But, and here is the key question: Who are the unrighteous in Psalm 14? Who are the righteous in Psalm 14? Let's read it.

- The **unrighteous** in Psalm 14 are those who deny God in their heart (verse 1), those who have turned aside from God (verse 3), and those who have no knowledge of God (verse 4).
- And the **righteous** in Psalm 14 are those who are poor and who turn to God for refuge (verse 6), and those who look for salvation to come out of Zion (verse 7).

And, absent the gospel, into which group does all of mankind fall? Absent the gospel (that is, absent that salvation out of Zion in Psalm 14:7), every person on earth who has ever sinned falls into the first group — the unrighteous with no knowledge of God. Absent salvation through faith (that is, the salvation that comes to those who turn to God for refuge as in Psalm 14:6), no one is righteous — no not one!

Remember, Paul is talking about the problem here — the problem of sin. We have all sinned; that is why we are all unrighteous. But is that necessarily a permanent condition? Not at all — as Paul will very soon show us.

And so we should not be surprised to find both the unrighteous and the righteous in Psalm 14. Why not? Because we see those same two

groups here in Romans — the unrighteous and the righteous. Romans 1:17 told us that “the **righteous** shall live by faith,” and Romans 1:18 describes the “**unrighteous** of men.”

Before we leave Psalm 14, to whom was that Psalm directed? Are the accusations in Psalm 14 directed against the Jews or against the Gentiles?

On the one hand, the initial charge of atheism (“There is no God.”) sounds like the Gentiles — but not necessarily. There is also such a thing as pragmatic atheism — the atheism of those who claim to believe in God but who live as if there is no God. And that was the condition of many Jews, as the prophets all attest.

Zephaniah 1:12 — At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’

And Paul himself also describes such people in another of his epistles:

Titus 1:16 — They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

And so, while Psalm 14 applies to the Gentiles, we cannot say that it applies **only** to the Gentiles. Psalm 14 is also describing the Jews — a fact that Paul will confirm when we get to verse 19.

And so, once again, what we find is that Paul has sprung a trap on the Jews. Any Jew reading Psalm 14 would have numbered himself among the righteous in verse 5 and would have numbered the Gentiles among the unrighteous deniers of God in verse 1. And yet what is Paul telling them here? Paul is saying that **all** — both Jew and Greek

— are the unrighteous in Psalm 14. That is the word found in both Psalm 14 and Romans 3 — **ALL!** “They have **all** turned aside.” “**All** have turned aside.”

Later Paul will tell them how to become a part of the righteous, but that is not what he is doing here. Paul is still describing the problem — and he is using these Old Testament verses to show that everyone — both Jew and Greek — has that problem. And that common problem, of course, will mean that everyone — both Jew and Greek — needs the common solution to that common problem — a solution that is found only in the gospel of Christ.

Romans 3:13-14

Romans 3:13-14 — “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

The three quotations in verses 13-14 are from Psalm 5, Psalm 140, and Psalm 10.

Psalm 5:9 — For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.

Psalm 140:3 — They make their tongue sharp as a serpent’s, and under their lips is the venom of asps.

Psalm 10:7 — His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

What we said about the first quotation from Psalm 14 also applies to these three quotations from the Psalms — Paul is using these verses to prove that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And that is true even if the Psalm also discusses the righteous or also accuses the Gentiles, as we saw with Psalm 14.

Psalm 5:9 says there is no truth in **their** mouth, Psalm 140:3 says that **they** make **their** tongue sharp, and Psalm 10:7 says that **his** mouth is filled with cursing. Whose mouth? Whose tongue? About whom were those Psalms written? Let's take a closer look.

- Psalm 5:8 answers that question about Psalm 5:9 — the unrighteous in Psalm 5 were the enemies of King David. “Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies.”
- Psalm 140:1 answers the question about Psalm 140:3 — the unrighteous in Psalm 140 were, again, the enemies of King David. “Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men.”
- Psalm 10:4 answers the question about Psalm 10:7 — the unrighteous in Psalm 10 were the wicked who thought “there is no God.” That's the same group we saw in Psalm 14.

So we are right back where we were with Paul's previous quotation — these Psalms, at least on the surface, are not describing everyone. Instead, these three Psalms are describing the enemies of the King and the wicked who live as if there is no God.

But isn't that everyone absent the gospel? Absent the gospel, aren't we all enemies of the King? Absent the gospel, aren't we all living as

if there is no God and as if there will never be a judgment day? Doesn't that describe everyone who rejects the gospel of Christ?

Yes, and Paul himself will soon tell us that very plainly.

Romans 5:10 — For if **while we were enemies** we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Absent the gospel, we were all enemies of God. We were all enemies of the King. And, likewise, Paul will also tell us that those who live as if there is no God are enemies of God.

Philippians 3:18-19 — For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as **enemies of the cross of Christ**. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, **with minds set on earthly things**.

I think Paul's point here is the same when he quotes these Psalms. We were all enemies of God prior to obeying the gospel — and that was true of both Jew and Gentile. We were all living as if there is no God prior to obeying the gospel — and that was true of both Jew and Gentile. We all had our minds set on earthly things prior to hearing and obeying the gospel.

That is how we were **living** — but Paul is more concerned here about what we were **saying**. We shouldn't miss the fact that Paul's focus here is on the tongue. I am reminded of something James, the brother of Jesus, taught us:

James 1:26 — If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

And I am reminded of something Jesus said to the Pharisees:

Matthew 12:34-36 — You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

When we look at those verses, I think we can say that our speech may be the surest indicator of our heart. There is a direct connection between what we say and what is in our heart.

That is certainly true of the unrighteous in verses 13-14 — their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive; the venom of asps is under their lips; their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

And you know what? That describes the speech of everyone who is apart from Christ. They may think they are so spiritual and so well spoken, and they may think that their speech is so important and so pleasing to God — but if they are enemies of Christ, then their speech is worthless. If they deny God, then their throat is an open grave. If they do not know God, then they use their tongues to deceive, and the venom of asps is under their lips. If their minds are set on earthly things, then their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

What was once said to Peter in Matthew 26:73 could also be said to them: “thy speech betrayeth thee!”

And that's not just **some** enemies of the King — that's **all** enemies of the King. And the enemies of the King include everyone who has not obeyed the King and who is not a faithful subject of the King. And that is true of both Jew and Gentile.

Romans 3:15-17

Romans 3:15-17 — “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.”

The quotation in verses 15-17 comes from Isaiah 59.

Isaiah 59:7-8 — Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.

Their feet. Their paths. They have not known. Whose feet? Whose paths? Whose knowledge? With some of the Psalms, the answer may have included the Gentiles — but not here. We know from its opening verses that Isaiah 59 is describing only the Jews.

Isaiah 59:1-3 — Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness.

Isaiah 59 is describing the people of God who had turned their back on God. God wanted to hear them and wanted to save them — but they would not have it. Their sin had separated themselves from God. These verses from Isaiah were directed, not to faithless Gentiles, but to faithless Jews.

But why does Paul quote these specific charges? “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” Why? Because in those three charges we find a complete description of the generation of Jews that rejected the promised Messiah.

“Their feet are swift to shed blood”?

Acts 3:14-15 — But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

“In their paths are ruin and misery”?

Matthew 23:36-38 — Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate.”

“And the way of peace they have not known”?

Ephesians 2:14-17 — For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of

commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

The faithless Jews who rejected Christ were swift to shed blood — and as a result they found only ruin and misery. When they rejected the Prince of Peace, they rejected the way of peace. This quotation from Isaiah 59 is a perfect description of the people of God who turned their back on God and who rejected the Son of God.

And while some of the Jews reading this letter may have been thinking about the Gentiles in those quotations from the Psalms, no one was thinking about the Gentiles in this quotation from Isaiah. Isaiah 59 was written to the Jews and was written about the Jews.

Yes, that's about the Jews, but Paul applies it to everyone! And we all know why. Yes, the Jews murdered Jesus (Acts 7:52), but we all had a hand in that deed. Just as Psalm 14 applies to the Jews as well as the Gentiles, so Isaiah 59 applies to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Paul is telling us that here, but Isaiah also tells us that.

Isaiah 53:5-6 — But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Anyone who places the blame for the murder of Jesus only on the Jews is following the example of Pilate who “washed his hands before

the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person” (Matthew 27:24). When it comes to the death of Christ, we all have blood on our hands. “Your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

No one, neither Jew nor Gentile, can wash their hands of the blood of Christ. But we can all be washed — and Paul will soon tell us how.

To quote Isaiah once again, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Romans 3:18

Romans 3:18 — “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Paul’s final quotation comes from Psalm 36.

Psalm 36:1 — Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

There could be no better capstone to Paul’s argument than that statement from Psalm 36 — “there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

That single statement is the perfect summary of all mankind apart from Christ. And that single statement is the perfect description of this lost and sinful world. “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Peter describes those who have no fear of God.

2 Peter 3:3-7 — Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise

of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

And Jesus tells us whom we should fear.

Matthew 10:28 — And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Why do some hear and reject the gospel of Christ? The answer to that question is always the same — there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Why do so many people live lives that are directly opposed to the will of God? The answer to that question is always the same — there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Why do some obey the gospel of Christ but then drift back into the world? The answer to that question is always the same — there is no fear of God before their eyes.

And so, Paul ends his discussion of the problem of sin with this quotation from Psalm 36:1, but Paul will very soon tell us all about the solution to that problem. And you know what? Psalm 36 told us the same thing! Psalm 36 also describes the solution to the problem of sin.

Psalm 36:9 — For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

The solution to the problem of sin is found only in the fountain of life!
And Jesus is the fountain of life!

John 7:37 — On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.”

Romans 3:19

Romans 3:19 — Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

Although Paul has been speaking to the Jews, verse 19 is the first time he mentions the law in this chapter. Our Handout for Lesson 25 showed us every verse in Romans that mentions the law, and our Handout for Lesson 34 shows us the same thing for the rest of Paul’s epistles (excluding Hebrews, which some attribute to Paul).

Paul tells us two very important things about the law here in verse 19 — one thing that he tells us directly, and another thing that he tells us indirectly.

Let’s start with what Paul tells us indirectly about the law. Paul has just quoted six Old Testament passages — and how does Paul describe those six passages here in verse 19? He refers to them as “the law.”

Yes, there is a narrow sense in which “the law” can refer to just the law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. And, yes, there is a slightly

broader sense in which “the law” can refer to just the first five books of the Bible. But Paul is using “the law” in neither of those senses here.

In verse 19, Paul refers to the Psalms and to Isaiah as “the law.” And Paul does that again with Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 14:21 when he quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 and says, “in the law it is written.”

And Jesus also does the same thing. Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34 and asks, “Is it not written in your Law?” And again Jesus quotes Psalm 69:4 in John 15:25 and refers to it as “the word that is written in their Law.”

I once heard a preacher in Austin, Texas, say that the Psalms were just poetry and that we really shouldn’t rely on them for doctrine. But we know that Jesus and Paul had a different view! They both relied on the Psalms for doctrine — and they both referred to the Psalms as the law. Yes, the Psalms are poetry, but the Psalms are also the law!