

• *The Old Testament makes it clear that Jewish people need a Saviour*

• *Quotations with exposition*

Sin affects everyone

• *Sin affects our minds*

• *Sin affects our aspirations*

• *Our tendency to get out of the will of God*

• *Our way of influencing each other*

• *The unkindness of the human race*

• *The way we talk to each other*

• *Three sins of the tongue – deception, destructiveness and damage to others*

• *Pain, distress and ignorance of God's peace*

• *Climax – absence of an appropriate fear of God*

Paul now goes into a string of quotations from the Old Testament. For people who respect the Scriptures (and sometimes for those who don't) it is good to prove what we say from the Bible. Paul wants his readers to know that the Old Testament itself makes it clear that Jewish people need a Saviour. Paul speaks as an inspired apostle but his teaching can be shown to be true by referring to the Old Testament.

First he quotes the Greek translation of Psalm 14:1–3 (or the almost identical words in Psalm 53:1–3). ¹⁰*As it is written, 'There is no one who is righteous, not even one.'* It seems to be Paul's own part-translation, part-exposition of Psalm 14:1, and to draw also on Psalm 14:3 and Ecclesiastes 7:20. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament the quotations are often half-expositions, and often they draw on more than one passage. **Sin affects everyone.** There is no exception: 'There is no one righteous, no, not one.'

After a sweeping general statement, Paul gets down to details. Next comes a line that focuses on our lack of spiritual understanding. ¹¹*'There is no one who understands.'* **Sin affects our minds.** It affects our inner life.

Then Paul considers **our aspirations**, our hopes, what we are living for. *'There is no one who seeks for God.'* He is quoting Psalm 14:2b. Sin affects our ambitions. One of the greatest tests of life is not simply the matter of particular sins but our overall ambition.

Next he considers **our tendency to get out of the will of God.** ¹²*'All have turned aside.'* Sin produces a twistedness in us.

Then comes **our way of influencing each other** so that we move like a flock of sheep into spiritual uselessness. *'Together they have become useless.'* We all follow each other in sinful ways. We sin 'together'.

Then he deals with **the unkindness of the human race:** *'There is none who shows kindness, not even one person.'* Sin produces an unkindness towards our fellow men and women.

His next two lines are taken from Psalm 5:9. ¹³*'Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive.'* Then from Psalm 140:3 he takes the line which says, *'The poison of snakes is under their lips.'* Then he quotes from Psalm 10:7, ¹⁴*'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.'* All of these lines from the Psalms are connected with **the way in which men and women show their sinfulness in their talk.** Our talk is the last thing we learn to bring under control. The first of three sins of the tongue is deception. The second is destructiveness and murderous ill-will. The third is the attempt to use the tongue to somehow bring damage and suffering to another person. Paul gathers these quotations from the experience of David to remind the Jewish Christians at Rome that their own greatest king experienced the hatred that comes from human sinfulness.

Next comes the way in which this sinfulness of humankind shows itself in violence, in the infliction of pain and distress, and in its ignorance of God's way of peace. He moves from the throat, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, to the feet¹⁵ and the eyes¹⁶. Lines from Isaiah 59:7, 8 point to different aspects of human destructiveness. ¹⁵*'Their feet are swift to shed blood. ¹⁶Destruction and misery are in their ways ¹⁷and the way of peace they have not known.'* Human sinfulness shows itself in the infliction of pain and distress, and in ignorance of God's peacefulness.

Romans 3:18, Paul's last quotation at this point, comes to a climax: the human race is characterized by disregard and disrespect for God. Quoting from Psalm 36:1, Paul says, ¹⁸*'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'* The complaint of the psalmist was that men and women in sin did not have a right fear of God. There is an appropriate and proper fear of God. It is the

☞¹ 3:15

☞² 3:18

beginning of wisdom¹.

¹ Proverbs 1:7

**Conclusion:
Everyone
needs a
Saviour**

• Both Jews and Gentiles guilty before God

• Possessing the law does not remove the need for a Saviour – rather it brings the knowledge of sin

• The only thing that the law can do is intensify the experience of sin

Paul now concludes the line of thought he has been following since Romans 1:18. ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it is speaking to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world held accountable to God. The point is: the Scriptures he has been quoting were written to Jewish people. The Old Testament was never for the gentile nations! ‘Law’ in verse 18 refers to the entire Old Testament. If the Jews were condemned by their own Scriptures and if the gentiles were even worse, then ‘every mouth is stopped’. No one can argue back with God. Every person in the human race needs a Saviour. Our protests and complaints and self-justifications are out of order. We are guilty! Our attitudes, our words, the kindnesses that we have withheld from others, the hard and bitter things our mouths have said, everything adds up to one thing: guilty before God!

In verse 20 Paul gives an answer to anyone who feels that possessing the law of God means that God is favourably disposed towards us and will not judge us. He explains why the Jew – those who are under the law – is guilty with everyone else. ²⁰For by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The possession of the law, and its associated books of prophecy and psalmody that Paul has been quoting, must not make the Jew feel exempt from the need of a Saviour. The fact is no one can be ‘justified’ – declared righteous before God – by the law. Through the law comes ‘the knowledge of sin’. The ‘knowledge of sin’ that Paul has in mind is not simply detached, academic information that we have sinned in this way and in that way.

Equally his point is not that the law ‘convicts’ of sin in the way in which John 16 uses the word ‘convict’. One can know the law by heart and yet not feel very sinful at all! For much of the time the law did not convince the Jew that he was a sinner at all. Paul’s point is this. When we seek to put ourselves under it the only thing that the law can do is intensify the experience of sin. As often the word ‘knowledge’ has the sense of ‘experience’. We could translate, ‘Through the law comes **experience** of sin’. Paul does not develop the point here. He will do so in Romans chapter 5 and Romans chapter 7. Paul will say that when the law comes, it makes matters worse! ‘And the law entered in with the purpose that the trespass might abound . . . !’ There is no refuge in the Mosaic law; if it does anything it only intensifies our experience of sin. Fortunately Romans does not stop at Romans 3:20. If it did our despair would be suicidal. Fortunately Paul has more to say. ‘But now . . . !’ What a mercy it is that God says ‘But’.



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