

Romans

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Romans 3:9-18



Vs. 9

- Paul here wants to be plain: no one is better than anyone else. Why? because "both Jews and Greeks", all of us, are "under Sin". Paul makes this statement as a charge, an accusation, in the name of the King of Kings. In effect, nothing has changed since before the time of Noah. All of humanity is "under Sin".
- The phrase "under Sin" has to do with the question of authority and power. Michael Jordan would say that he played **under** Coach Smith when he was in college. He played the position Coach Smith put him in. He came out of the game when Coach Smith told him to come out. He went to practice at the time Coach Smith set. In Matthew 8, when Jesus is confronted by the centurion with the ailing servant, Jesus is ready to go to the centurion's house, which was an incredible concept by itself, but the centurion said "No, that he wasn't worthy for Jesus to come to come into his house, that all Jesus needed to do was to say the word and the servant would be healed". And he explains in vs. 9 saying, "For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come', and he comes and to my slave, 'Do this', and he does it." Paul is thinking of the same concept here.
- In so doing, Paul is distinguishing between "sins" and "Sin". "Sins" are singular acts/thoughts that are not right by God's standard. "Sin" is the evil authority and power of darkness that envelops the world and rules humanity. To see it, all you need to do is watch the news for 30 minutes.

Vss. 10 -18

- The rabbis had a method of teaching called "charaz". It literally means "stringing pearls". The idea was to take a series of verses and string them together to make a point or build an argument. This is exactly what Paul is doing here. Again, primarily, he is speaking to the Jews in the Roman congregation, as obviously the Old Testament scriptures are going to carry weight with them that such would not with the Gentiles.

Primarily here Paul is pulling from the Psalms, but he is quoting from memory, so the verses do not all line up word for word.

- Given that his primary point is that “all are under sin”, he begins in vss. 10-11 with Psalms 14:1-3 and 53:1-3. No one can claim to be righteous. No one understands the Way of God or truly seeks Him as they are in darkness under the power and authority of Sin.

- In vs. 12 Paul quotes Ps. 14:3. All of humanity has “turned aside”, lost control and gone off the road like a vehicle with a broken axle. The result is that people have become “useless”. The word there literally means “has turned sour”. So fruit juice or milk that is soured is not fit to drink. Eggs or meat that have soured is not fit to eat. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount points out salt that has lost its savor and is “useless”, good for nothing except to be thrown out into the street and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13). This is the end result of a life lived “under Sin”.

- In vss. 13-14, Paul is quoting Psalms 5:9, 10:7, and 140:3. Like James 3:8 where lips are full of poison and Jesus in Matthew 5:22 where our words condemn us to death and hell, Paul is pointing to a person’s speech as evidence of being lost and “under Sin”. Thus our throats are an open grave of fleshly rot and decay. Our tongues are full of deceit, just as in 1 Samuel 18 where King Saul offered David his most beautiful daughter as bride if David would fight the Philistines. Saul wanted David dead, but rather than soiling his own hands, let the enemy do his dirty work for him. Those “under Sin” live with their mouths full of “cursing and bitterness”. Check out the Facebook pages of people who are lost for all the proof you need.

- In verses 15-18, Paul quotes Isaiah 59:7-8 and Psalms 36:1. One only need to look at the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East or the nightly news from the streets of America’s major cities to see how quick to violence we are. And violence always brings misery to both the intended and unintended. In the wake of every war is hunger and sickness. More people died from the 1918 Spanish Flu than in WWI, but the Great War was the incubator of the disease. And why? Because people “under Sin” do not fear God (Lk 23:40).