

ALL UNDER SIN: ROMANS 3:9-20

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ALL UNDER SIN: ROMANS 3:9-20

Translation

3:9 What then? Are we [Jews] better off [than Gentiles]? Not at all! For we have already accused everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, that we are all under the dominion of sin. **3:10** For it is written:

	No one is righteous.
3:11	No one understands.
	No one seeks God.
3:12	Everyone turns away, Each one made worthless. No one practices kindness. Not. Even. One.
3:13	Tapped tombs are their throats. Their tongues deceive. Viper venom is on their lips.
3:14	Their mouths are full of curses and bitterness.
3:15	Their feet are swift to shed blood.
3:16	In their path is ruin and misery;
3:17	The path of peace they know not.
3:18	There is no fear of God before their eyes.

3:19 For we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those under the law, in order that every mouth might be shut and the whole world become answerable to God. **3:20** Therefore, all flesh before him, no one will be made righteous by works of the law, because the recognition of sin comes through the law.

Exegetical Main Idea

The law reveals that both Jews and Gentiles have sinned before God and their neighbors, and therefore Jews are no better off than Gentiles even though they have the Law.

Exegetical Outline

- I. Jews and Greeks are both under sin (3:9).
 - A. Jews are not better off than Greeks (9a).
 - B. Jews are not better off **because** Jews and Greeks are both under sin (9b).

- II. The law confirms that all are under sin (3:10-18).
 - A. No one does what is right before God (10-12).
 - 1. No one is righteous (10).
 - 2. No one understands or seeks God (11-12a).
 - 3. No one acts according to God's standards (12b).
 - B. Everyone hurts their neighbors (13-18).
 - 1. Everyone sins with their words (13-14).
 - 2. Everyone sins in their actions and way of life (15-17).
 - 3. Everyone sins with their attention (18).

- III. Therefore, the law will justify no one (3:19-20).
 - A. The law speaks to those under the law (3:19a).
 - B. The law silences everyone (3:19b).
 - C. **Therefore**, practicing the law will not make anyone righteous (3:20a).
 - D. The law will justify no one **because** the law reveals sin (3:20b).

Commentary

Context

In Romans 3:9-20 Paul concludes the argument he began in 1:18. Starting with an indictment of Gentile immorality and unrighteousness before God based on their rejection of God through idolatry and hypocritical moralism in 1:18-2:16, Paul moves on in 2:17-3:8 to indict

the Jews of their failure to fulfill the clear commands of God despite their advantages as God's covenant people who have been entrusted with his Law. Paul concludes that "all flesh before him' will not be justified by works of the law" (3:20), based on the assumption that no one can fulfill the law due to human frailty and bondage to sin (cf Moo 221-22) and the demonstrated fact that people follow their own way rather than following God's righteous demands (1:23; 2:1, 21-24; 3:9, 12). Paul supports his radical view of the human predicament with a litany of old testament quotations composed to impact the reader with conviction and clearly demonstrate that the Hebrew scriptures confirm his argument that the Jews are damned along with the Gentiles for their unrighteousness. Much like the prophet Amos, Paul masterfully weaves an indictment against Jewish Christians who are holding to the law starting with the surrounding nations before turning to zero in on them: The fact that they have the Law will not save them from God's judgement of the world when they themselves have not followed it (cf 2:13).

Commentary

Jews and Greeks are both under sin (3:9).

Jews are not better off than Greeks (9a).

Paul begins this passage by addressing Jews (or perhaps more specifically, the Jewish Christians in Rome) with two rhetorical questions, following up on his argument from 3:1-8. The first, "what then?" (τί οὖν;) is a continuation of his argument that Jews are indeed "advantaged" by the Law and their covenantal relationship with God. In 2:17-29, Paul argued that "circumcision is of benefit (ὠφέλει)" only if one does the law (2:25; cf 2:13), and then he follows up by affirming that the Jews do have a benefit (ἡ ὠφέλεια) from being Jews – namely, that they have the very "words of God" (3:1-2).

Now, echoing the language of 3:1, Paul asks if this advantage makes Jews superior to Gentiles, “do we have an advantage?” (προεχόμεθα;). Even though the first person plural is a bit ambiguous, Paul has been addressing Jews in the context and probably uses the inclusive “we” to include himself with the Jewish Christians in Rome in contrast to the Gentile believers in the audience. Thus, Identifying “we Jews” as the subject provides a satisfying solution (see Appendix 1). In this way he asks whether “we Jews” have any advantage.

Paul then contradicts this statement with the phrase, “not at all!” (οὐ πάντως; see BDAG 756.5.a; cf 1 Cor 5:10). This would seem to contradict that fact that Paul said the Jews were advantaged in 3:1-2; however, Paul probably purposefully uses different terminology here (προεχόμεθα in 3:9 vs. ἡ ὠφέλεια in 3:1–2) and is clearly addressing a different issue as can be seen in the following verse. The Jews have an advantage in terms of possessing the “words of God” (3:2), which Gentiles lack (cf 2:14), but Jews do not have an advantage in terms of righteousness because even though they have the law, they do not keep the whole law and are thus condemned by it (2:12; cf Deut 28:1-2, 15; 2 Kgs 21:8; Gal 5:3; Jas 2:10). Jews are not better off **because** Jews and Greeks are both under sin (9b).

Paul now explicitly states the reason that Jews are not better off than gentiles, introducing the next clause with the postpositive causal γὰρ. Essentially, Paul is restating what he has already said in 1:18-3:8, that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners, but he makes the point more emphatic before backing it up with scriptural support. The aorist middle main verb, προητιασάμεθα, means to be judged beforehand. This is its only occurrence in the New Testament, and appears to be an editorial first person plural in which Paul is referring to his own argument, though perhaps including his audience as participants in his flow of thought (BDAG 865; Wallace 394-96; cf Rom 1:5). The middle voice can be seen as being deponent with active meaning (i.e. BDAG 865)

or as an indirect middle, since Paul would be included as a person affected by this accusation (cf Robertson 812; Wallace 419-22).

Προητιασάμεθα begins indirect discourse with the infinitive εἶναι, stating the charge leveled. Both Jews and Greeks (Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας; cf 1:14, 18; 2:9-10) are under sin (ὕφ' ἁμαρτίαν). The ὑπό here indicates that Jews and Greeks are under the control or dominion of sin (BDAG 1036.B.2), and “Greeks,” as elsewhere in Romans, applies to non-Jewish people (i.e. Gentiles; BDAG 318.2.a) to emphasize the cultural distinction between the Jewish and Gentile believers in Paul’s audience. The proper subject of the infinitive is the accusative plural πάντας, which is likely placed after the appositive “Jews and Greeks” to emphasize Paul’s main point: *all* are under the dominion of sin. The Jews initially addressed are as fully culpable to God’s judgement and wrath as Gentiles.

The law confirms that all are under sin (3:10-18).

Now, to further show that Gentiles and Jews are in the same predicament under the dominion of sin, Paul strings together a sophisticated, structured chain of quotations from the Jewish scriptures. Several scholars argue that this chain of citations is a pre-Pauline structure, perhaps a Jewish or Jewish Christian *testimonia* or *florilegium* (Fitzmyer 333-34; Longenecker 334-36, 354-58). Scholars cite *Psalms of Solomon* 17:15, 19 (Jewett 259), the *Damascus Document* 5:13-17, and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* 27 as parallels (Thielman 181). However, even if Paul did not compose this collection of scriptures *ad hoc*, there is no reason to doubt the Pauline composition or redaction of these verses for the present context (Thielman 181; cf Kruse 165-66), while also recognizing the importance of the poetic composition of these verses (see especially Seifrid¹ 616-17).

¹ Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 607-93.

The basic structure of the passage follows the pattern of the ten commandments (Exod 20) and the Great Commandment of Jesus (Matt 22:37–40; Mark 12:29–31) by moving from relationship before God (Rom 9:10b–12) to relationships with people (vv 13–17) and then concluding with a restatement of people’s relationship to God (v 18). The first section gains structure from the repetition of οὐκ ἔστιν which occurs at the beginning of five of the seven lines in verses 10b through 12 (see Structural Layout). The second section is characterized by body parts (throat, tongue, mouth, lips, feet, eyes), and has parallel structure, chiasmic structure, and a rhyme scheme (cf Seifrid 616–17; see Structural Layout). The first, third, sixth, and eighth lines end in ἀνθρώπων (vv 13a, c, 16, 18), the central lines (vv 14–15) each end with a suffix with μ (Greek letter “mu”), and the second and seventh lines end in -σαν (vv 13b, 17). This differing structures for each section of the catena demonstrates that Paul is not only saying people have turned away from God theoretically, but also emphasizing their demonstration of this in their relationships to other people.

Paul primarily uses passages from the Psalms², quoting the Septuagint translation of Psalm 13:1–3 (MT 14:2–4), 5:10, 139:4 (MT 140:4), 9:28 (MT 10:7), before quoting Isaiah 59:7–8, and finally ending with the second half of Psalm 35:2. While the initial passages originally referred to the Gentile nations, Isaiah and Psalm 35:2 (MT 36:1) refer directly to Israel and people under the law. So it seems that Paul draws a picture from the lesser to the greater that the Gentile nations turn away from and do not seek after God, but Jewish people have proven just as guilty according to their own law.

No one does what is right before God (10–12).

² Longenecker takes this as evidence that this is a pre-Pauline composition, since Paul most often quotes from the Pentateuch and the prophets (334-36).

No one is righteous (10). Paul begins with his usual introduction of scriptural material, “Just as it is written” (καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι). Καθὼς is comparative, but with a causal nuance, since Paul is clearly using this statement to support his argument (BDAG 493.1; cp 493.3 and Rom 1:28). The intensive perfect γέγραπται emphasizes the affect and relevance of these scriptures for his readers (Wallace 574-76). Thus, Paul is not merely asserting the fact that the Israelites and Gentile nations in the past sinned, but that these scriptures are representative of the present reality of his readers. Ὅτι, then, introduces indirect discourse—giving the “what” of what is written.

Paul’s first statement could be an adapted quotation of the beginning of Psalm 14:1-3 (LXX Ps 13), in which case Paul changed the word “kindness” (χρηστότητα) to “righteousness” (δίκαιος) to fit his argument. However, he is perhaps purposefully conflating the LXX of Psalm 13:1c with LXX Eccl 7:20, which says “there is no man who is righteous in the earth, who does good and will not sin” (ὅτι ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος ἐν τῇ γῆ, ὃς ποιήσει ἀγαθὸν καὶ οὐχ ἁμαρτήσεται). One reason for this is that both these passages give a good synopsis and preview of his argument, but it also seems likely that Paul is trying to preserve the inclusio of the Psalm between 13:1c and 3b (cf Rom 3:12b; Fitzmyer 335; Jewett 254; Kruse 166; Seifrid 616; Longenecker 357; cp Moo 211-12). Employing οὐδὲ εἷς as a double negative with οὐκ make the statement emphatic (see Harvey, *EGGNT*, 83 citing Robertson 751, 1154). Thus, “there is not any one who is righteous,” or more literally: “there is not a righteous person, not one.”

No one understands or seeks God (11-12a). In verse 11 Paul continues the Catena with a paraphrase of Psalm 13:2c (LXX) or potentially an allusion to the Hebrew version of the Psalm (Seifrid 616). He skips the first part of 13:2 which describes God looking down at humanity to see if anyone understood or sought him. He amends and expands the last part of this verse by

adding οὐκ ἔστιν and the article ὁ. This demonstrates the purposefulness in the arrangement of these quotations. Paul is not merely quoting the psalm verbatim; he shapes them for rhetorical or poetic effect. Turning these questions into indicative statements is justified because of answer in Psalm 13:3 that all have turned away.

BDAG defines συνίω as “to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one’s thinking or practice” (972). Thus the indictment that no one “understands” God does not mean that anyone has comprehensive knowledge, but that their knowing him affects their way of life. This has implications for Paul’s conclusion of this pericope in 3:20, when Paul claims that the law brings the “knowledge” or “understanding” of sin, although he uses a different term there. The word ἐκζητῶν denotes an active seeking out of someone or something, most notably the relationship between seeking the Lord and following his decrees in the Hebrew scriptures (Dt 4:29; Ps 33:5; 68:33; cf Acts 15:17; BDAG 302.1). Thus, one’s posture toward God has ethical implications, which Paul will make explicit in 3:12b and concrete in verses 13-17.

Paul responds now verbatim with the Septuagint text of Psalm 13:3, “all have turned away, together being made worthless” (Rom 3:12a). He now makes a positive indictment, centering these lines between the five negative statements beginning with οὐκ ἔστιν (three before and two afterwards). Πάντες in Psalm 13:3 seems to have universal implications, but is primarily directed at enemies of the “righteous generation,” presumably referring to faithful Israelites and thus directed at impious Gentiles or apostate Israelites. However, Paul seems to be applying the term here in an even more universal sense, as his conclusions in 3:9 and 3:19-20 seem to demonstrate. The first verb, ἐξέκλιναν, is active and denotes an active turning away or avoidance of someone (BDAG 304.1.b; cf Deut 29:17; 31:29 LXX), but the second, ἠχρεώθησαν, is aorist passive, likely a divine passive (or, perhaps, permissive), “all together

being made worthless,” harkening back to God’s “giving them over” to their sinful passions (Rom 1:24, 26, 28; cf 3:9 and 7:14). Perhaps this is why Paul omits Psalm 13:2a. Since, in Paul’s argument, God has already given people over to their own devices, he is in some sense no longer “looking down on them;” he has given up looking for righteous people.

No one acts according to God’s standards (12b-c). Paul Concludes his initial section of the catena by returning to the οὐκ ἔστιν motif. Several textual issues raise their heads here because it appears the transmission of the LXX of Psalm 13 has been retroactively affected by Romans 3:10-18. However, it seems most likely that (1) Paul here continues to quote Psalm 13:3 verbatim except for the addition of the article ὁ before ποιῶν to maintain parallelism with verse 11 and that (2) the final οὐκ ἔστιν was original to create an inclusio with verse 10b (see Appendix 2).

Paul has begun to transition here from a disposition or attitude toward God to the ethical implications of that disposition with the phrase “there is no one who does what is right” (12b). It is significant that Paul uses the term χρηστότητα, or kindness, employed by the Psalmist. Paul has used several terms related to patronage and gifting in his letter thus far (Rom 1:5, 7; 2:4), a theme which he continues to develop (11:22; cf 3:24; 4:4, 16; 5:2, 15, 17, 20-21 et al). Thus, rather than translating this as “no one who does what is right” (BDAG 1090.1), it may be more appropriate to translate the phrase “no one who practices kindness,” meaning “the quality of being helpful or beneficial” (BDAG 1090.2). This is especially meaningful as a contrasting parallelism to 12a. Usually this “kindness” would be directed toward someone, but Paul is vague here and could be referring either to people or God (cf BDAG 1090.2.a). Thus, these final lines of the first section (a strophe?) of the catena act as a hinge to 3:13-17 where Paul focuses on people’s actions against other people (Seifrid 616).

The final phrase of this section aligns, if not in exact form, then in meaning and impact with 3:10b. While 10b uses οὐδὲ εἷς to make an emphatic statement (see v 10b), 3:12c reiterates this point in a slightly different way, making it even more emphatic. Psalm 13:1c and 3c (LXX) both repeat this same statement, so it seems that Paul is artfully punctuating this strophe by employing both variation of syntax and concord of thought. “There is not even one.” While the predicate adjective δίκαιος, “righteous,” should probably be assumed, Paul likely leaves it off here to heighten the rhetorical effect. This fact makes it even more clear that at least some distinction should be made between 10b-12 and 13-18. Paul punctuates the first section before beginning the second.

Everyone hurts their neighbors (13-18).

Paul now moves from internal attitudes and dispositions before God to external expressions of unrighteousness beginning with speech (13-14), moving to physical actions (15), and finally progressing to the whole way of life (16-17), before returning again to one’s disposition towards God (18). In contrast to verses 10 to 12, verses 13 to 14 draw on three separate psalms, and verses 15 to 17 draw on Isaiah 59. While the first section was bound by the anaphora, οὐκ ἔστιν, these next lines are bound together by more vivid parallelism, the repetition of αὐτῶν, and even an apparent rhyme scheme (see above and Structural Layout).

Everyone sins with their words (13-14). Verses 13 to 14 quote verbatim from the Septuagint of Psalms 5:10b and 139:4, and the last line only slightly alters Psalm 9:28 (MT 10:7). Each line of these verses presents an organ of speech (throat, tongue, lips, mouth), moving from the more internal to the more external, almost as if describing snapshot stages of something coming out of a person’s mouth (cf Matt 15:18-19; Mark 7:19; Luke 6:45; cp Gal 4:6; 2 Tim 2:2). Understanding the stages of this imagery helps better understand the point of the first line,

“their throats are open graves” (Rom 3:13; quoting). If this is describing something coming out of a person’s mouth, then an open grave would be letting death and decay *out*, rather than some vague reference to devouring people (cf Moo 212). Τάφος, “grave,” can readily be used in a metaphorical sense as it is here (BDAG 992.2). The perfect passive adjectival participle ἀνεωγμένος modifies τάφος and emphasizes the access people give the world to their sinful, deadly internal world (BDAG 84.2), the passive perhaps shifting to focus on the agency of people in activating their sin (84.5.a; cf Wallace 436-37, #6–7). This is the only occurrence of λάρυγξ, “throat,” in the New Testament. Thus, sin comes up from the inside, vividly portrayed as coming up through the throat, over the tongue, onto the lips, and out of the mouth into one’s actions.

The next organ of speech, still quoting Psalm 5:10b verbatim, is the tongue, ταῖς γλώσσαις. The verb ἐδολιοῦσαν, “deceive” or “deal treacherously,” only occurs here in the New Testament, but is related to the more common noun δόλος, “deceit, cunning, treachery” (BDAG 256). It is third person, singular, imperfect (apparently not aorist; cf BDAG and LSJ 443 where Ps 5:10 and Rom 3:13 are the only cited examples). This Psalm, although not specifically addressing Israel, does address generically those who are rebellious towards God and, importantly, enemies of his chosen king—David, in the case of the Psalm’s original setting. So, their treachery is towards God’s royal representative, his messiah, and thus for Paul, against Jesus Christ.

The next line comes from the Septuagint of Psalm 139:4b (MT 140:4b). The modifier ἀσπίδων, “of vipers/asps,” makes it clear that ἰδός means “poison” or “venom” rather than “corrosion” (BDAG 477.1.a; cp 477.2). Thus their tongues are described as active agents of harm rather than a passive process (cp Jas 5:3). While ὑπὸ normally means “under,” here it is probably

more generically referring to the location of the poison “upon their lips” (see BDAG 1036.B.1.b). This Psalm also refers generically to enemies of King David in its original setting, and thus could easily apply to describe unrighteous Jews as well as Gentiles.

The final line again displays the careful composition of the author in arranging these passages. While essentially quoting Psalm 9:28 (10:7 MT), Paul throws the subject forward, modifies the number of the relative pronoun (singular to plural), and throws the verb to the end. All of these adjustments seem to be simply to fit the structure of the Catena (cf Seifrid 616-17). Putting τὸ στόμα at the beginning of the phrase creates a parallelism with ταῖς γλώσσαις in 13b and οἱ πόδες in verse 15, and ending the line with the verb γέμει creates a consonant ending with αἶμα in verse 15. The verb γέμει seems to almost always have a negative connotation (BDAG 191.a) and here is used with two genitives of content (Wallace 92), concluding this section with the implication that people’s words are as totally corrupt as their disposition toward God. This Psalm does seem to be directed towards Gentiles in its original setting (cf Ps 9:20; 10:16); however, this is not a problem for Paul’s argument since he is lumping Jewish people into the same predicament as Gentiles of unrighteousness before God.

Everyone sins in their actions and way of life (15-17). These next verses move to actions and then artfully to the whole way of life of unrighteous people. 3:15-17 essentially quotes from the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 59:7-8. The first verse shows some compositional modifications from the text of Isaiah, but verses 16 and 17 precisely quote Isaiah 59:7c-8a. Paul uses a different word for “swift” than the Isaiah passage, throws the subject, οἱ πόδες, forward, and skips Isaiah 59:7b. In contrast to the Psalm passages, which were directed at Gentiles or generally unrighteous people, this passage from Isaiah directly confronts the national and personal sins of the Jewish people in rejecting their God. The passage comes from the

middle of an extended treatment in Isaiah confronting Israel's rebellion (Is 56:9-59:15) following a passage on salvation going to the nations (55:1-56:8) and followed by several passages about the restoration of Israel (59:16ff). Thus, Paul here links in to a slew of passages with a direct bearing on themes he addresses throughout the letter.

Verse 15 describes the physical death that people bring upon others and is the natural result of turning away from God (cf 3:13a). Not only are people disposed to hate, harm, and murder one another (cf Exod 20:13; Matt 5:21-26), they are also "swift," ὀξεῖς, to do so. The idea is not merely speed, but precision and skill accomplishing the task (BDAG 715.2). The verb ἐκχεῖν can have the sense of "pour out" with blood (i.e. murder), but also the connotation of giving oneself over to something (BDAG 312.1.a; cp 312.3). Thus, in Paul's estimation, people not only turn away from God and harm others, they give themselves over to the task with skill, precision, and speed.

Paul swiftly changes from bodily harm to the character of the whole way of life, spending only one verse on "feet," πόδες, and two on "road" or "way," ὁδός, referring to the whole manner of living or character of a person's life (BDAG 691.3.a-c). Not only is that life characterized by ruin and misery (3:16), but it is also characterized by a lack of peace (17). Peace is a theme in Romans. Peace is enjoyed in right relationship with God (2:10; 8:6; 14:17), who is the source of peace and is in his character peace (Rom 1:7; 15:13, 33; 16:20), and which results in right relationships with people (12:18; 14:19). So it makes sense that all who have turned away from God would lack well-being in their own life and in their relationships with others (BDAG 287.1.b, 2.a). Paul may have intentionally changed the last word for "know" from οἶδασιν to ἔγνωσαν, since γινώσκω has more of an experiential nuance "they don't even recognize or experience the way of peace" (cf BDAG 200.4) or "they don't even comprehend the

way of peace” (cf BDAG 200.3). This continues developing the idea of knowledge in this passage looking back to 3:11 “there is no one who understands (God)” and forward to 3:20 “through the law comes the recognition of sin.” For Paul, knowledge and one’s application of it matter a great deal, and a lack of this experiential knowledge of God and his ways directly correlates to the human predicament of sin.

Everyone sins with their attention (18).

Finally, Paul comes full circle to summarize the disposition of all people toward God with the image of eyes. He quotes Psalm 35:2 (LXX; 36:2 MT) verbatim except for changing the final αὐτοῦ to αὐτῶν, both to continue the plural “all people” (3:11) and to complete the ABACCABA parallel structure of the second stanza. The final repetition of οὐκ ἔστιν signals a link back to verse 10 to 12 and the final line of the catena. “There is no fear of God before their eyes” idiomatically expresses the spiritual disposition described especially in 3:10-12. Φόβος, especially with θεοῦ typically means reverential fear or honor towards God (BDAG 1062.2.b.α). This idea is expressed throughout the Israel’s scriptures as an injunction to motivate a righteous and humble manner of living before God (Deut 10:12; 1 Cron 16:25; Job 28:28; Ps 19:9; 33:8, 18; 111:10; Prov 1:7). However, Paul could also mean this as a double entendre—the appropriate response in this condition ought to be numinous dread in light of the impending wrath and judgment coming on all the unrighteousness (1:18; cf Josh 2:11; 4:24; 9:24; 14:8; Is 2:19, 21). Indeed, “the fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God’” (Ps 13:1 LXX), which Paul has left out of his direct quotation in 3:10-12 but perhaps implied all along.

Paul’s poetic catena of scriptures supports, concludes, and punctuates his argument from 1:18 to this point. All, both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned before God and this has led to the perpetuation of human evil and the predicament of just judgment before God. Thus, in Paul’s

estimation, Jews and Gentiles find themselves equally condemned before the righteous judge of all the earth. In the next few verses, he summarizes this argument before turning to his solution in 3:21ff.

Therefore, the law will justify no one (3:19–20).

The law speaks to those under the law (3:19a).

Having completed his scriptural indictment, Paul synthesizes and summarizes both the last several verses of 3:9-18. Typically Paul will present a passage to support his larger argument and then offer an interpretation (cf Eph 4:7-14). This may be what he does here in some sense, but it appears that he moves more or less straight to application. The explanatory δὲ signals Paul's explication of the implications of the passages he has just quoted (Wallace 673). Οἶδαμεν plus ὅτι commonly introduces a generally accepted and well-known fact (BDAG 693.1.a; cp Rom 3:11, 17, 20). The accepted content is that “whatever the law says it speaks to those who are in the law” and could extend to the ἵνα clause. Paul likely uses both λέγει and λαλεῖ here for clarity and style rather than emphasizing their only slightly different nuances. The law, although it often refers to the Pentateuch in Paul, clearly refers more broadly to the whole of the scriptures of Israel, since he draws his previous quotations from the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah. “In the law” refers to those who were under the control of or subject to the law (BDAG 328.4.c), i.e. Jews. Thus, this truth applies in a special way to Jews, who have the “words of God.” However, its purpose points beyond them to the nations.

The law speaks **in order to** silence everyone (3:19b).

The ἵνα clause here indicates both the purpose and end result of what the law says in relation to the righteousness of people (Wallace 473–74; Thielman 188). The purpose extends to two subjunctive verbs, “silenced” and the phrase “become answerable.” The first, φραγή, in the

aorist passive, echoes scriptures which depict the Lord silencing the wicked (Job 5:15–16; Ps 107:41–42; 63:11—the only example in the passive). What is perhaps surprising to his audience is that Paul argues *all* are silenced, including Jews with Gentiles. Furthermore, he repeats $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$ in the second phrase, “the whole world.” The world will “become answerable,” $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$, to God. Thielman notes that $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ “was commonly used in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s era for being ‘under indictment’ or legally ‘answerable’ either to a wronged party or a judicial authority, with the party who must receive satisfaction expressed in the dative case” (188; cf BDAG 1087). Moo’s suggestion that $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ plus $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omega}$ in the dative allows God to be depicted as both the injured party and the judge of the offence has merit in light of Romans 3:26 (214). Thus, this depicts the final righteous judgment of God on all those who have turned away from him with or without access to the enscripturated law given to Israel (Rom 1:18; 2:5-13, 16).

Therefore, practicing the law will not make anyone righteous (3:20a).

The inferential conjunction $\delta\iota\acute{o}\tau\iota$ signals Paul’s conclusion to the entire argument from 1:18 to 3:20. “Therefore, no one will be made righteous by works of the law” (20a). Paul’s obtuse language here emphasizes the universality of his point. “All flesh before him” has important parallels to old testament passages describing all creation, particularly all mankind, (Gen 6:12-13, 17; 9:17; Jer 25:31; 45:5; Ezek 20:48; 21:4-5), and of particular note is Zechariah 2:13: “Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling” (cf Gal 2:16; 1 Cor 1:29). Possibly Paul has combined this passage with Psalm 142:2b (LXX; MT 143:2), lit. “will not be justified before you, all life,” replacing $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$ $\zeta\tilde{\omega}\nu$, “all life,” with $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\sigma\alpha$ $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$, “all flesh,” to clarify the universal application of this fact (see Kruse 171; cp Moo 215 who argues Paul’s use of $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$ may be theological to refer to humanity’s frailty under the dominion of sin).

The main verb, δικαιοθήσεται, has been a major theme in Romans, appearing fourteen times. It is an “affirmative verdict” that a person is “pronounced and treated as righteous” (BDAG 249.2.b.β), and is clearly a divine passive, especially since God’s agency can be applied from the context. Paul has already argued that only “doers of the law,” οἱ ποιητοὶ νόμου, will be declared righteous (2:13), and established that no one does in fact do the law (1:18-3:19). Therefore, it seems clear from the context that Paul’s qualification “by works of the law,” ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, means that practicing the law either according to the written law or conscience (2:12) cannot justify a person before God. This is because all people have failed in fully practicing the law and in fact live under the dominion of sin (3:9) and actively turn away from God and his law (3:10-12) to harm others and demonstrate they are all law breakers (3:13-18, 19). Therefore, if people are to be justified it has to be in some way other than by keeping God’s written or intuitive law (cf 3:28).

Although there is some current debate about this phrase, the basic meaning, “doing what the law requires,” is essentially agreed upon (see Moo 235-37). Some (i.e. New Perspective scholars) restrict its application to Jewish people and specific covenant rites like circumcision, purity laws, and keeping the sabbath. However, while the issue of boundary markers indeed looms large in Paul’s thought elsewhere, here (1) it seems clear that Paul is making a universal claim by lumping Jews and Gentiles into this same predicament together of not being righteous before God, and therefore “works of the law” must necessarily have some application to both Jewish and Gentile believers. (2) The works Paul refers to are much broader in scope than the major Jewish boundary markers: 2:7-10 refers to “doing good things” as the basis of judgement in contrast to “doing evil things,” 2:12-15 indicates that Gentiles “without the law” can do the law via their consciences—clearly excluding actions like circumcision and other covenantal,

ceremonial rituals, which they could not possibly conceive of without access to the written law—and 2:17-24 focuses on moral law breaking rather than ceremonial laws. Therefore, “works of the law” here has in view any good works that correspond to God’s moral or written law.

The law will justify no one **because** the law reveals sin (3:20b).

The reason Paul gives for the claim that “no one will be justified by works of the law” is that “through the law comes the recognition of sin.” The causal γὰρ indicates that Paul is supplying a reason for the preceding statement. The verb must be supplied. Διὰ νόμου is probably best taken as means, “through/via the law” (BDAG 224.3.d), and what comes by means of the law is “understanding of sin” (see Appendix 3). Because of the universal reality of sin, the law always (1) brings with it the indictment of sin and, according to Paul, (2) seems to incite further sin. Regardless of the Law’s goodness or utility, for everyone who encounters it, Jew or Gentile, it bears witness to the judgment of God against them in their rebellion against him and their evil perpetuated against one another.

Thus, Paul has completed his indictment that Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Not only does Paul point out the reality of rebellion against God in both Gentile and Jewish people, but he contends that the law itself affirms this reality, so that Jews and Gentiles are equally condemned and without excuse before God on the basis of their attitudes, will, and actions in such a way that they cannot make up for them by attempting to do good things in accordance with God’s revelation. The whole of scripture testifies to the massive predicament of just judgment before God in the face of human sin, and neither Jew nor Gentile is exempt.

Application

This sobering passage reminds believers that their natural condition, regardless of their privileges or background, was as rebellious and condemned by God as that of any other. Even if

someone has the privilege of knowing the scriptures, that person is no better—and even more culpable—than the person who does not know God’s specific character and standards revealed in scripture. There is nothing either of these people can do on their own to vindicate themselves before the righteous God whom they have despised and rejected. Thus, first, they must not see themselves more highly than they ought (Rom 12:3) or better than any other person, and second, they must humbly look to God for any possible hope of their restoration before him (cf 3:21-22).

This passage should immediately check a believer whenever he or she starts to compare themselves with others. In the church, one’s denomination or Bible knowledge does not count more than their neighbors in relation to their standing before God. They will both be judged either as sinners on their own merits or as saints on the merits of Christ.

This passage should also bring a fresh douse of realism to a reader’s life. Paul speaks in stark, lucid terms about the dark, pervasive, universal reality of sin in our world. Every one of us and every part of us, body and soul, are wholly given over to harming one another and ignoring God when left to our own devices. The world rightly stands condemned, and this should motivate us to turn towards God and look for his salvation in humility, awe, reverence, and fear.

STRUCTURAL LAYOUT OF ROMANS 3:9-20

Τί οὖν;

Question.

προεχόμεθα;

Question.

οὐ πάντως (προεχόμεθα)·

Answer.

προητιασάμεθα γὰρ Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας πάντας ὑφ' ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι,

Supporting causal statement with γὰρ.

καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι

Supporting comparative statement with καθὼς introducing evidence with content ὅτι.

Οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς,

οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ συνίων,

οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν.

πάντες ἐξέκλιναν

ἅμα ἠχρεώθησαν·

οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ποιῶν χρηστότητα,

[**οὐκ ἔστιν**] ἕως ἐνός.

τάφος ἀνεωγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν,

ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιοῦσαν,

ἰὸς ἀσπίδων ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτῶν·

ὣν τὸ στόμα ἀρᾶς καὶ πικρίας γέμει,

ὄξεις οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν ἐκχέαι αἷμα,

σύντριμμα καὶ τάλαιπωρία (ἐστίν) ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν,

καὶ ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν.

οὐκ ἔστιν φόβος θεοῦ ἀπέναντι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.

Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ,

Supporting explanatory statement with δὲ, coordinate to 9b.

ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῇ

Purpose-result ἵνα clause.

καὶ

ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ·

Coordinating purpose-result.

διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ,

Concluding inferential statement with διότι.

διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας (ἐστίν).

Supporting causal statement with γὰρ.

APPENDIX 1: VALIDATION – JEWS, GREEKS, OR BOTH?

The voice of *προεχόμεθα* in 3:9 and its rarity in the New Testament poses several problems for understanding this passage. Who Paul is addressing and their relative positions becomes the main points at issue: he could be addressing Jews, Gentiles, or Christians more generically. According to BDAG, *προέχω* has the general meaning “to be in a prominent position” (869.1). In the passive it would mean something along the lines of “are we excelled (by someone)?” or “are we worse off?” In the middle it normally meant “to hold (something) before oneself for protection;” however, several translations and commentators take the middle as active – “do we have an advantage?”

Moo elucidates five options (207-209):

1. Normal middle meaning with Paul as the subject (cp BDAG 869.2)
2. Normal middle meaning with Jews as the subject (see Godet; Murray; Stuhlmacher)
3. Passive meaning with Jews as the subject (Fitzmyer 330)
4. Passive meaning with Gentiles as the subject (Jewett 257)
5. Middle form with active meaning with Jews as the subject (Cranfield 189; Longenecker 352-3; Schreiner 162; the Vulgate and most English translations)

The first and third options, while possible, present issues because Paul has been directly addressing Jews or Jewish Christians since 2:17 and further *τί οὖν* seems to denote a continuation of Paul’s diatribe against Jewish arrogance in regards to righteousness and the law (cf 3:1). Option two appropriately posits Jews as the subject, “we Jews.” However, normally the middle construction with this meaning requires an object which specifies the basis of the defense or excuse (BDAG 869.2; Moo 208, note 579). Since this object is lacking and not readily supplied by the context, this seems unlikely.

The primary contenders are thus options three and five. The passive meaning has the advantage of the least lexical and linguistic issues. The meaning “to be worse off” is attested in

the ancient literature (BDAG 869.1); however, there is no agent signaled by ὑπό + genitive and Paul has just spent the last several verses delineating the advantages of the Jews (2:17-18; 3:1-8).

Alternately, the middle can be taken as active, i.e. “are we Jews at an advantage?” This accords well with Paul’s argument thus far that the Jews have the advantages of being God’s chosen people (cf τὸ περισσὸν and ἡ ὠφέλεια in 3:1). In this sense, Paul would be confronting the Jew’s advantages in relation to righteousness. They have advantages, but they are not at an advantage in terms of righteousness, because they, along with the Gentiles, are all under sin (3:9b). The phenomenon of a verb occurring in the middle form with active meaning does occur frequently in the New Testament literature, but this would be the only occurrence of προέχω used in this way. Moo overstates the case when he says, “no early Christian interpreter apparently took the verb in this way” (209, see note 586), since the best attestation of this meaning is the Latin of Jerome’s Vulgate (see Longenecker 352). While the evidence is far from conclusive, the middle with active meaning seems make the most sense of the context.

APPENDIX 2: TEXTUAL PROBLEM IN 3:12

The textual problem in 3:12 has implications for how this chain of citations ought to be read. A small number of significant manuscripts lack the words οὐκ ἔστιν, which have already been repeated four times in verses 10-12. If they are included here, then Paul may be emphasizing two distinct points between vv 10-12 and 13-18, but if they are lacking, he is more likely focusing on only one central point. While most witnesses support the longer reading (all Western and Byzantine and most Alexandrian), a few significant readings lack οὐκ ἔστιν (notably B and 1739). It is much more likely that a scribe would have unintentionally dropped these words than added them. A scribe might have omitted them because of their redundancy or added them to conform the passage to Psalm 13:3 more accurately. Paul often varies the wording of Old Testament quotations for the sake of style or clarity; however, he has been quoting the passage verbatim so far in 3:12. In conclusion, the longer reading is narrowly preferable since it could not have been an unintentional error and there is little impetus for intentional change, which could go in either direction. The good, if not conclusive, external evidence supports this conclusion and thus the reading with οὐκ ἔστιν should be cautiously received with a C rating.

APPENDIX 3: WORD STUDY - ἘΠΙΓΝΩΣΙΣ IN 3:20

Ἐπιγνώσις is similar if not equivalent to γνώσις, “knowledge,” in most Greek literature. LSJ lists no classical examples of the word, so it could merely be an intensified form of γνώσις that came into use in the Koine period. In the Septuagint, ἐπιγνώσις takes on a more concrete, experiential meaning. According to TDNT the broader use of “knowledge” in the LXX was “not thought of in terms of the possession of information. It is possessed only in its exercise or actualization” (1.698). Perhaps significant here, the simpler, verbal form γνωσκω occurs in the garden and fall narratives in Genesis in describing the “tree of knowing of good and evil” and its consequences (LXX Gen 2:9, 17; 3:5, 7, 22; cf 4:1).

In the New Testament ἐπίγνωσις expresses knowledge about God, Christ, or God’s will which has ethical implications (Eph 1:17; 4:13; Phil 1:9; Col 1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10; Philem 6) or a knowledge of God or truth that is equivalent to receiving the Gospel message (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 2:7; Titus 1:1; Heb 10:26; 2 Pt 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20). In Romans Paul seems to use the terms γνώσις and ἐπίγνωσις for a more experiential understanding in contrast his use of οἶδα for generic knowledge of a fact. Ἐπίγνωσις seems to be more strongly experiential or impactful knowledge (cp Ro 3:17, 19, and 20).

Romans 3:20 uses ἐπίγνωσις uniquely in reference to sin. Through the law comes a “recognition” of sin. In accordance with its use in the rest of the New Testament, this “knowledge of sin” has ethical implications. Sin, using the law, incites people to sin (7:7, 5-11), ultimately resulting in death (6:21, 23). In 7:13, Paul uses a clearer word to describe the use of the law to reveal (φανεῖ) sin, so in Romans 3:20, he seems to be saying that the law itself indicts all humanity of their sin, ignoring without ignorance God’s righteous requirements.