

Nobody is Righteous – Part 1

The theme of righteousness, God's righteousness and the requirement for man to possess such righteousness permeates the entire book of Romans. Today we encounter some quotations from the Old Testament. I could quickly look at how they are used in Romans and move on. There are, however, some nuances I think would help you better understand Paul's thinking. As a result, "Nobody is Righteous" will extend to two or three lessons in order to better understand context.

Romans 3:5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)

Paul is warning us. He is arguing from a human perspective. Perhaps he has heard these arguments in his various travels. He wants to quash them with logic from a spiritual perspective.

Have you ever played chess against yourself? Say you don't have anyone with whom you can play chess, but that is what you want to play. So you set up the pieces and alternately take white and black. It is also an instructive exercise if you analyze different tactics.

Here Paul is debating two sides of issues to demonstrate the false logic of seemingly logical arguments.

This concept was touched on with last week. God is righteous. People are unrighteous because the unbeliever cannot produce righteousness that is pleasing to God from his sin nature. The sin nature produces unrighteousness and human righteousness that we know is abhorrent to

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God (Isaiah 64:6). But God reacts to our unrighteousness. The NASB translation says “demonstrates” the righteousness of God.

Demonstrates. Literally it is "to stand with." Translated “to commend” “establish”, “stand near” and “consist” among other words. I may be stretching the definition a little if I add, "to incite," to "inflame" and “provoke.” The idea is that God demonstrates His perfect righteousness in response to our unrighteousness. While it is true that He demonstrates His righteousness, it is more than a vanilla podium lecture on righteousness from God. If you are acting unrighteous, God our Father, will spank you because of His righteousness. It is, of course, to motivate you to return to fellowship for a believer. At times God acts in righteousness to save lives, to give unbelievers time to consider the gospel.

There are people who insist on sinning so that God will demonstrate His essence. I have told a story before which D. A. Carson told at some conference and recorded in an mp3 file. It is a true story which he observed. It goes something like this.

D.A. Carson was in Germany honing his skills in German. He encountered another pastor also sharpening his skills at speaking German. This other pastor let it slip that he was cheating on his wife. D. A. Carson quizzed him on the contradiction of this behavior compared to what the Bible commands. The other pastor said that his job as a sinner was to sin and God’s job as God was to forgive. The problem the other pastor was sure to encounter was God’s righteous discipline. The pastor should have been walking by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit, not engaging in adultery.

Paul is saying that is not how it works. We don’t sin to demonstrate God’s righteousness. Instead we walk by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit that God’s glory be demonstrated in our own lives.

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Romans 3:6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

May it never be! This is one of the most emphatic Greek expressions of “no!”

God judges the world. As mentioned three lessons ago, God cannot pervert His essence. He remains faithful to who He is. As a result, His creation, which was corrupted in the Garden, must be judged. But in order to judge it, He must remain righteous. He cannot pervert His righteousness by letting sin go without judgment.

Romans 3:7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

If lying causes God’s glory to abound then why not continue to sin? Why should I be judged as a sinner? Paul is still arguing from a human perspective.

Romans 3:8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

Now Paul is not just playing both sides of the debate. He brings in actual slanderous claims. We see this kind of claim today in politics. It is often described in the press as “If you cannot win an argument on substance, then attack your opponent’s character.” Paul is often being criticized by false teachers. Anyone who stands up for the Bible will be criticized by both unbeliever hostile to Christianity and by believers who are neck deep in legalism.

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There is a related topic that gets legalists upset: eternal security. Once saved, always saved. Some would say this is a “license to sin.” Eternal security is well documented in the Bible. What legalists do not understand is that sin invites divine discipline.

Here is a nice summary from Thomas Constable of Romans 3:1-8¹ and the false claims:

“To summarize, in verses 1 through 8 Paul raised and answered four (questions) that a Jew might have offered to squirm out from under the guilty verdict that Paul had pronounced on him in chapter 2. The essential objections are as follows:

1. The Jews are a privileged people (vv. 1-2).
2. God will remain faithful to the Jews despite their unfaithfulness to Him (vv. 3-4).
3. God will be merciful since the Jews' failings have magnified God's righteousness (vv. 5-6).
4. God will overlook the Jews' sins since they contribute to the glory of God (vv. 7-8).”

God must remain faithful to His essence which includes righteousness.

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Paul has from time to time lightly touched on Jews versus Greeks. He has in mind a fuller explanation of “What about the Jews” in Romans chapters 9-11. He is looking forward to something that is very much on his heart and so he ends up including some of that material here in a peripheral way. I have done something similar. Herman has done that. When a pastor gets excited about something he is working on, he can't

¹ <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf>, pages 73-73

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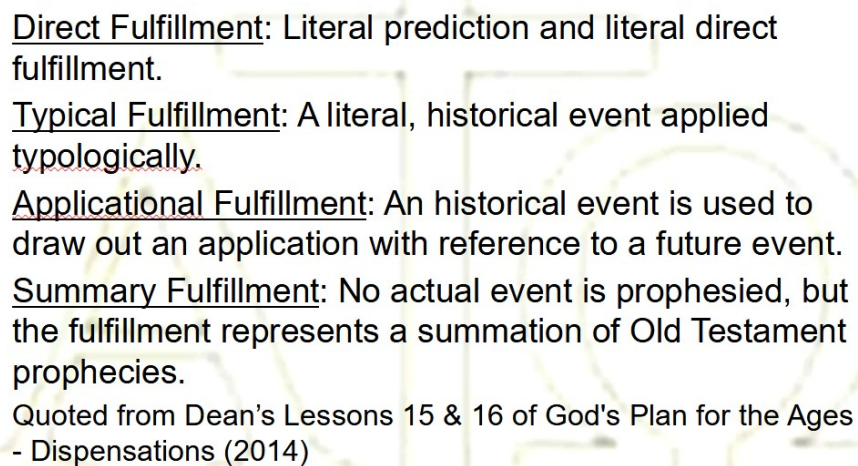
help but put something about it in his sermon today. So, Paul looks to what he will write in Romans chapters 9-11 concerning the Jews.

Now we get to several quotes from the Old Testament to show that what Paul is teaching is founded upon the Old Testament, or as he would say, “The Scriptures.”

Those to whom he is writing have the same Scriptures that he has. So he can point back to them as authoritative references. It is true because it was written in the past such that it stands written and is accepted by all as authoritative.

Before going to the quotes, let us review how the New Testament writers used the Old Testament.

Briefly, the rabbis had a method of interpreting prophecy. D. L. Cooper picked this up and applied it to how the Old Testament is used in “fulfillment” passages in the New Testament. That was picked up by Michael Rydelnik. Here is a slide I used from Robby Dean:



Direct Fulfillment: Literal prediction and literal direct fulfillment.

Typical Fulfillment: A literal, historical event applied typologically.

Applicational Fulfillment: An historical event is used to draw out an application with reference to a future event.

Summary Fulfillment: No actual event is prophesied, but the fulfillment represents a summation of Old Testament prophecies.

Quoted from Dean's Lessons 15 & 16 of God's Plan for the Ages
- Dispensations (2014)

I am not going to go in depth on the types of fulfillments. Instead, I want to focus on “application.” That is what Paul is doing with the quotes. He is applying an Old Testament principle which still applies during the

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Church Age. He is using them as “proof texts.” What he says is true because it is based upon Scripture.

Romans 3:10 as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;

It is written. It is one word, a verb, perfect passive (or middle) indicative. The perfect indicates it was written in the past so that it stands accepted as authoritative Scripture. There may be a subtle play on words here as well. He identifies the quotes as “it is written.” The Jews separate the books of the Old Testament into three categories: Torah (Pentateuch), Prophets and Writings. All the quotes are from the Psalms. The Psalms are in the “Writings.”

Today, it is difficult to quote the Bible to an unbeliever. Many, perhaps most, do not accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God. They don’t even know what is written in the Bible. But Paul’s audience accepts its authority. He can say “it is written.” You accept its authority; I accept its authority. So when Paul quotes it, there should be no argument. God has spoken. It stands written.

In Romans 3:10-18 Paul quotes six times from the book of Psalms. A logical, obvious question is Why? Why not quote from the Torah? Commentaries agree these quotes are just from the Psalms. But, there is no explanation of why. Let us look at some facts in order to suggest an answer, even if it is not definitive.

The Torah is based on historical events. As we have seen previously, a quote from the Old Testament Scriptures often brings in the context the quote is taken from. There are contexts those events introduce into the texts. Contexts that Paul does not want to introduce and distract his listeners. If he brings in a context, he wants it to mesh with his theme of righteousness to amplify his context, not detract from it. The Psalms,

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while not devoid of historical connections are often focused on concepts and relationships between God and individual believers. Also, the Pharisees built legal and theological “fences” around the Torah. The idea was to insulate the people from the requirements of the Torah by making more stringent requirements. So, even if the people broke through the fences, they should be protected from actually violating the Law. Paul wants to deal with concepts devoid of erroneous additions and burdens of the Law. In these early chapters of Romans, Paul is dealing with concepts and relationships with God.

Before delving into individual texts of the quotes, let us take a look at an overview of the Psalter, or the Song Book. The reason is that Paul is here quoting primarily from one part of the Psalms.

“Historically the psalms cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.).²”

There is an obvious structure to the book of Psalms. We do not know who gathered all the psalms together and organized them into a whole. But there is obvious editing since they appear to be a coherent whole.

- I. Book 1: chs. 1—41 (the book of personal experience)
- II. Book 2: chs. 42—72 (the book of Elohim)
- III. Book 3: chs. 73—89 (the dark book)
- IV. Book 4: chs. 90—106 (the book of the King)
- V. Book 5: chs. 107—150 (the book of praise)

Here is another perspective on the five book division of the Psalms:

² <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf>, page 6

³ <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf>, page 16

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“In "The Flow of the Psalms," O. Palmer Robertson posits a thematic progression throughout the five books of Psalms, delineating distinctive characteristics and emphases:

Book 1: Opposition - Predominantly attributed to David, these Psalms are perceived as the earliest in origin, characterized by a focus on trust in God, with Yahweh as the dominant name.

Book 2: Communication - Despite continued opposition, this book reflects an outreach even to enemies of God. The prevalent name for God shifts to Elohim, especially when borrowing sections from Book 1. Robertson suggests Book 2 may have Northern Kingdom origins.

Book 3: Devastation - Marked by the overtaking of Jerusalem, this book holds out hope for Jacob and Joseph, possibly symbolizing the Southern and Northern kingdoms. Expressions like "trust in God" diminish.

Book 4: Maturity - Notably, with over 10 quotes from Chronicles, indicating a temporal progression beyond the initial three books.

Book 5: Consummation - Robertson proposes that the Psalms of Ascent and Hallel Psalms are post-Babylonian exile compositions, portraying a culmination of themes and perspectives.⁴”

Paul, here in Romans chapter 3, quotes exclusively from Psalms. Mostly from Book 1. And all the Psalms are authored by David.

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalms>

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Romans	Psalms	Psalm Book/Author
3:10-12	14:1-3/ 53:1-3	I: David/II: David
3:13a	5:9	I: David
3:13b	140:3	V: David
3:14	10:7	I: Likely David
3:15	59:7ff	II: David
3:18	36:1	I: David

Is it possible that Paul sees himself in a similar light as David in the aspect of being attacked unfairly? So he brings in those passages in which David wrote emphasizing those verses indicating the nature of his attackers. Everyone who can operate only from their sin nature, unbelievers and believers out of fellowship, are hostile toward God.

Let's look at the text of Romans 3:10

Romans 3:10 as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;”

Psalms 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.

Psalm 53:1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,” They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; There is no one who does good.

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Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

Some have questioned exactly where Paul got his quote in Romans 3:10. That is why I have included the additional Bible verses. Paul has cut and pasted quotes from Psalm 14:1-3. I will not enter the debate on specifics. Psalm 53 is included since it is nearly an exact duplicate of Psalm 14. According to one source, Paul’s wording in verse 10 is closer to the Ecclesiastes passage. It includes “righteous” whereas Psalm 14 uses “good.” It is obvious that this thought, no one is righteous/good, is embedded in the Old Testament, especially seeing that there are three passages that include essentially the same verbiage.

Let us take the Psalm 14 passage and look at it as a context for what Paul quotes.

David was a keen observer of humanity. Being a mature believer most of his life, he could interpret human behavior from the divine perspective.

Romans 3:10 as it is written, “There is none <u>righteous</u>, not even one;	Psalm 14:1 ...There is no one who does <u>good</u>.
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We note that Paul in Romans 3:10 has substituted “righteous” for “good.” Righteous links to what Paul is talking about in Romans: righteousness.

At the risk of boring you with details, I want you to see Paul’s thinking here.

The key issue for me is why did Paul translate the Hebrew word for “good” in Psalm 14:1 as “righteous.” Also, he adds, “no not even one.”

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The Hebrew of that phrase is literally, “None does good.” That is the basic dictionary literal meaning.

None. This is more than just “no.” Paul apparently sees an emphatic sense to this. Hence, Paul can say not just “none” but “none, not even one.” Per Gesenius’ Hebrew dictionary the Hebrew word means more than just “no.” It can mean, in general, “none,” “emptiness,” “vacuity.”

Is. Paul’s Greek uses the verb *eime*, is. So “None is righteous.”

Righteous. The Hebrew of Psalm 14:1 says “good.” But in that context, it means more than just good as the opposite of “bad.” The Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX) translates it not as “good” but as “kind.” It is the same word used by Paul in Galatians 5:22. So the translators of the LXX understood the context of the Psalm forces a meaning more than just “good.”

God is quoted as using this Hebrew word several times in Genesis chapter 1 to describe His creation. “It is good.” What does God mean by this? It is good because it meets God’s stringent standard. That standard is righteousness. So rather than changing the meaning of Psalm 14:1, Paul has gotten to the essence of the word, righteousness. And who am I to argue with Paul?

**Romans 3:11 There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;**

Preview of coming attractions:

**Romans 3:12 All have turned aside, together
they have become useless; There is none who
does good, There is not even one.”**

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**Romans 3:13 “Their throat is an open grave,
With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The
poison of asps is under their lips”;**

**Romans 3:14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing
and bitterness”;**

**Romans 3:15 “Their feet are swift to shed
blood,**

**Romans 3:16 Destruction and misery are in
their paths,**

**Romans 3:17 And the path of peace they have
not known.”**

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

**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 closed
and all the world may become accountable to
God;**

**Romans 3:20 because by the works of the Law
no flesh will be justified in His sight; for
through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**