

# Romans 3:12-13 Commentary

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Romans 3:12 **ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.**" ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** pantes exeklinan (3PAAI) hama (together) echreothesan (3PAPI): ouk estin (3SPAI) o poion (PAPMSN) chrestoteta, (ouk estin{3SPAI}) eos enos

**Amplified:** All have turned aside; together they have gone wrong and have become unprofitable and worthless; no one does right, not even one! ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one'. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** All turned aside; all to a man became useless. There is not the one who habitually does goodness; there is not as much as one.

**Young's Literal:** All did go out of the way, together they became unprofitable, there is none doing good, there is not even one.

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans 3:21-5:21	Romans 6:1-8:39	Romans 9:1-11:36	Romans 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " <a href="#">Jensen's Survey of the NT</a> "				

#### ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE: pantas exeklinan (3PAAI):

- Ex 32:8; Ps 14:3; Eccl 7:29; Isa 53:6; 59:8; Jer 2:13; Eph 2:3; 1Pet 2:25
- Romans 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**All** - The Greek word *pas* means just that - "**all**" with no exceptions. Every person ever born has been born "infected" with the deadly sin "virus" (Ro 5:12-note). The only "antidote" is the Good News of the Cross of Jesus Christ (Ro 1:16note, 1Co 1:18). **Have you received Calvary's cure, the only cure that guarantees complete remission of your sins? You say it will cost too much! Yes it cost God His only Son, but the price of redemption is free and simply needs to be received by grace through faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31)!**

Here is a list of the Old Testament passages which Paul quotes from

Romans 3:10-12 from Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3

Romans 3:13 from Psalm 5:9 and Psalm 140:3

Romans 3:14 from Psalm 10:7

Romans 3:15-17 from Isaiah 59:7-8 and see Isaiah 48:22

Romans 3:18 from Psalm 36:1

**Hodge** writes that...

Blinded by sin to the perfections and loveliness of God and truth, they have turned from the way which he has prescribed and which leads to himself and have chosen another way and another lot in life. (Hodge, C. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 1835)

**KJV Bible Commentary** - Man has not only "missed the mark," he has also "perverted his path." In this quote from the LXX of Psalms 14:3; 53:4, the picture is of a camel caravan crossing the desert which has strayed from the route and cannot return to the proper path. Likewise man has lost his way by deviating from God's prescribed route of righteousness. ([Dobson, E. G., Charles Feinberg, E. Hindson, Woodrow Kroll, H. L. Wilmington: KJV Bible Commentary: Nelson](#))

Paul quotes from the Septuagint (LXX = Greek of the Hebrew) translation of Psalm 14:3 and Psalm 53:3:

Ps 14:3 "They have all **turned aside** (LXX = ekkolino); together they **have become corrupt** (LXX = achreioo); There is no one who does good, not even one." (NASB)

Ps 53:3 "Every one of them has **turned aside** (LXX = ekkolino); together they **have become corrupt** (LXX = achreioo); There is no one who does good, not even one." (NASB)

**Turned aside (1578)** (**ekklino** from **ek** = out, out from + **klino** = incline, bend, turn aside or away) basically means to lean in the wrong direction, to bend out of the regular line, to bend away. It means to stir clear of, stay away from, avoid. It means to turn aside or deviate from the right way or course (exemplified by the use in the Septuagint of Malachi 2:8, Deut 5:32)

**Gilbrant** - Fundamentally, **ekklinō** has to do with "bending out or away." From the classical period onwards that picture was applied to such matters as changing direction, course of action, principles of behavior, and personal relationships. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Ekkolino** was used to describe a soldier's running the wrong way or deserting. Another secular use describes staying clear of prickly shrubs. Hippocrates used this word to describe a dislocation.

**Friberg** summarizes ekkolino - (1) as morally deviating from a right path turn aside, turn away ( Ro 3.12); (2) as declining to follow false teachers turn away (from), avoid, shun (Ro 16.17); (3) as **turning** from doing what is bad avoid, turn away (from), stop (1Pe 3.11) (Analytical Lexicon)

**Ekkolino** is used only 3 times in the NT (Rom. 3:12; 16:17; 1 Pet. 3:11) but 127 times in the Septuagint (LXX) --

Gen. 18:5; 19:2f; 38:16; Exod. 10:6; 23:2; Num. 20:17, 21; 21:22; 22:23, 26, 33; Deut. 2:27; 5:32; 16:19; 17:11; 20:3; 24:17; 27:19; 29:18; 31:29; Jos. 1:7; 23:6; Jdg. 2:17; 4:18; 10:16; 14:8; 18:3, 15; 19:11f, 15; Ruth 4:1; 1 Sam. 8:3; 12:20; 14:7; 15:6; 17:53; 25:14; 2 Sam. 2:19, 21; 3:27; 6:10; 1 Ki. 11:2, 4, 9; 15:5; 16:28; 22:43; 2 Ki. 4:8, 10f; 5:12; 1 Chr. 13:9, 13; 2 Chr. 20:10, 32; 34:2, 33; Neh. 9:19; 13:26; Job 23:11; 24:4; 29:11; 31:7; 34:20, 27; 36:19; 40:2; Ps. 14:3; 17:11; 27:9; 34:14; 37:27; 44:18; 53:3; 55:3; 101:3; 109:23; 119:21, 51, 102, 115, 157; 125:5; 139:19; 141:4; Prov. 1:15; 3:7; 4:15, 27; 5:12; 7:25; 9:4, 16; 10:25; 14:16, 27; 15:24, 27; 16:17; 17:23; 18:5; 24:7; 28:9; Isa. 9:20; 10:2; 66:12; Jer. 5:23, 25; 14:8; 18:14; Lam. 3:35; Ezek. 16:27; Dan. 9:5, 11; Hos. 5:6; Joel 2:7; Amos 2:7; 5:12; Zeph. 1:6; Mal. 2:8; 3:5, 7

Here are the other NT uses...

Now urge you, brethren, keep your eye on (skopeo) those who cause dissensions and hindrances (see skandalon) contrary to the teaching which you learned, and **turn away** (ekklino - present imperative = continually keep aloof from, shun) from them. (Ro 16:17-note)

"(Peter is summing up how a believer is to live in pagan society) AND LET HIM **TURN AWAY** (aorist imperative = do it now!) FROM EVIL AND **DO** GOOD; LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND **PURSUE** IT. (1Peter 3:11-note) (Peter is quoting the Septuagint translation of Ps 34:14)

**Comment:** Notice Peter in staccato-like fashion issues 3 commands, all in aorist imperative, calling for urgent action. Remember that in general the power to carry out the commands in the NT calls for the believer to renounce self effort and rely on Spirit enablement. So even though we do not see the Spirit specifically mentioned, His presence and the need to rely on His power is implicit. And this principle applies to all the NT imperatives, of which there are over 1000 (aorist and present imperatives)!

The picture conveyed by **ekklino** is of one bending aside from one's course -- in this verse in Romans the idea is turning from God's way and in the other two NT uses the idea is "bending aside" at the approach of evil.

In short **ekklino** describes morally deviating from the right path. **All** (no exceptions except the God-Man Jesus) men are inclined to leave God's way and pursue their own (cf. Isa 53:6). All have deviated, bent away from, steered clear of and swerved (so as to miss) godliness and virtue. The active voice indicates that the turning away is a deliberate choice and that they have not accidentally lost their way!

**Spurgeon** commenting on the OT Psalm (Ps 14:3) which Paul quotes here, writes "Without exception, all have apostatized from the Lord their Maker, from his laws, and from the eternal principles of fight. Like stubborn heifers they have sturdily refused to receive the yoke; like errant sheep they have found a gap and left the right field... The life of unregenerate humanity is in direct defiance of the law of God." (Treasury of David)

This truth is illustrated so clearly by Adam's action to disobey a direct commandment of God

"Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life." (Ge 3:17)

As discussed above, to "**turn aside**" indicates a personal choice... so when I was "in Adam", every time I was confronted with Truth and God's righteous demand and provision to make me righteous, I chose to shun that truth, even to eschew it (avoid because one despises or loathes) the result being that I turned away from Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Author and Perfecter of faith! In this life men can choose to "avoid" Jesus to a certain extent but one day "

at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Php 2:10,11-note).

**Ekkliino** is used to describe Samuel's sons who desired riches over godliness, the text recording that

"His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted (LXX = **ekklino** = they deviated from [imperfect tense describes the fact that they did this over and over]) justice." ([1Sa 8:3](#))

In the final NT use, Peter quoting the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) from Ps 34:14 writes that believers should

"**turn away from** (ekklino) evil and do good... seek peace and pursue it." (1Pe 3:11-note)

**Ekkliino** although used only 3 times in the NT is found 122 times in the Septuagint. For example, the psalmist exhorts us to

"**Depart** (ekklino) from evil, and do good, so you will abide forever." (Ps 37:27-note)

In another psalm David prays a prayer that would be good for every saint

"Do not **incline** (ekklino) my heart to any evil thing, to practice deeds of wickedness with men who do iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies." (Ps 141:4-note)

The psalmist writes that

"The arrogant utterly deride me, yet I do not **turn aside from** (ekklino) Thy law." (Ps 119:51-note)

"I have not **turned aside from** (ekklino) Thine ordinances, for Thou Thyself hast taught me." (Ps 119:102-note)

"Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not **turn aside from** (ekklino) Thy testimonies." (Ps 119:157-note)

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**ONE WHO TURNED ASIDE FROM HIS WAY** -- The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody told of being asked by the warden of a large prison in New York City to speak to the inmates. Because there was no chapel or other suitable or safe place to speak to the group, he preached from a gangway at one end of a large tier of cells, unable to see the face of a single prisoner. After the message he asked permission to talk face-to-face with some of the men through the bars of their cells. He soon discovered that most of the men had not even been listening to his message. When Moody would ask an inmate why he was in prison, the man almost invariably declared his innocence. He would insist that a false witness testified against him, or that he was mistaken for the person who really committed the crime, or that the judge or jury was prejudiced against him, or he would give some other reason he was unjustly incarcerated. Moody said...

"I began to get discouraged, but when I had gotten almost through I found one man with his elbows on his knees and two streams of tears running down his cheeks. I looked in at the little window and said, 'My friend, what is your trouble?' He looked up with despair and remorse on his face and said, 'My sins are more than I can bear.' I said, 'Thank God for that.' "

The evangelist was thankful because he knew that no man is open to God's way until he forsakes his own way, that he will not seek salvation until he admits he is lost.

## TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS: hama êchreôthêsan (3PAPI):

- Ge 1:31; 6:6,7; Mt 25:30; Philemon 1:11
- Romans 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

In his fifth charge Paul makes an incredible statement stating in essence that mankind is useless, unprofitable, of no benefit!

**Haldane** - They have become corrupted, or have rendered themselves useless; for everything that is corrupted loses its use. They are become unfit for that for which God made them; unprofitable to God, to themselves, and to their neighbor. (Haldane, R. An Exposition of Romans)

**Barnes** comments that **together** indicates that

They are as one; they are joined, or united, in this declension. The expression denotes union or similarity. (Barnes Notes on the NT)

**Become useless** (889) (**achreioo** from **achreios** = useless, unprofitable, in turn from **a** = without + **chreia** = utility, usefulness) means to make unprofitable or render unserviceable. It means to become depraved, morally worthless or corrupt. In the middle voice it means to become unprofitable or vile.

**Achreioo** is found only here in the NT and 6 times in the Septuagint (LXX) (2Ki 3:19; Ps 14:3; 53:3; Jer 11:16; Dan 4:14; 6:20)

**Useless or unprofitable** is the picture of rotten fruit; something irrevocably bad and therefore thoroughly useless.

Lightfoot says that **achreioo** is used to translate the Hebrew word which describes milk that has gone sour. Human nature without Christ is a soured and useless thing. Psalm 14:3 which Paul quotes in this section is translated as follows in several different versions:

"all alike turned sour" (NJB),

"they are together become impure" (JPS),

"they have together become corrupt" (NIV).

**Spurgeon** has an interesting note on Ps 14:3 writing that

"They are spoiled and soured like corrupt leaven, or, as some put it, they have become putrid and even stinking. The only reason why we do not more clearly see this foulness is because we are accustomed to it. But are there no special cases; are all sinful? Yes, says the psalmist."

In a note on the related Ps 53:3 **Spurgeon** adds that

"The whole lump is soured with an evil leaven. Thus, in God's sight, our atheistic nature is not the pardonable thing that we think it to be. Errors as to God are not the mild diseases which some account them; they are abominable evils." (Treasury of David)

**Albert Barnes** adds that

"This word ("corrupt" in Ps14:3) in Hebrew means , to become putrid and offensive, like fruit that is spoiled. In Arabic, it is applied to milk that becomes sour. Applied to moral subjects, it means to become corrupt and useless. They are of no value in regard to works of righteousness."

The Septuagint uses this word to describe Israel, Jeremiah writing that

"The LORD called your name, "A green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form"; with the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches **are worthless** (achreioo - are become good for nothing)" (Jer 11:16)

In the following use in Second Kings in a prophecy of Elisha we see a vivid picture of the meaning of this word

"Then you shall strike every fortified city and every choice city, and fell every good tree and stop all springs of water, and **mar** (Septuagint = achreioo - "spoil") every good piece of land with stones." (2Ki 3:19)

When man turns aside from Truth, he then becomes **unprofitable** to God and he is not available to God to use for any good

work (see good works) All we do in our flesh (Isa 64:6) is spoiled in God's holy eyes and unable to bring us any closer to the former oneness between the creation and their Creator.

Sin renders men **unprofitable** (unable to store up for themselves treasure in heaven, unable even to redeem the time).

Sin has made men **worthless** to worship His Holiness.

Although **achreioo** is only here in Romans 3:12 in the NT, the derivative root word "**achreios**" is used in Mt 25:30

"And cast out the **worthless** (achreios) slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth")

**Achreios** is also used in Lk 17:10

"So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are **unworthy** (achreios) slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'

This verse describes the logical outcome of the preceding statements. Because no one has stayed on the path to God, they have become **useless**. They cannot fulfill their purpose as creatures made in the image of God. They are like fish that cannot swim or birds that cannot fly.

**THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE: ouk estin (3SPAI) o poion (PAPMSN) chrestoteta ouk estin (3PAI) heôs henos:**

- Ps 53:1; Eccl 7:20; Isa 64:6; Eph 2:8, 9, 10; Phil 2:12,13; Titus 2:13,14; Jas 1:16,17
- Romans 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Ps 53:1 For the choir director; according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David. 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.**

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

**None** ([3756](#)) (**ou**) means absolutely none. No exceptions.

**Good** ([5544](#)) (**chrestotes** from the adjective **chrestos** = useful, profitable in turn from **chraomai** = to furnish what is needed in turn from **chráo** = lend, furnish as a loan) describes the quality of being helpful and beneficial. **Chrestotes** connotes genuine goodness and generosity of heart.

**Chrestotes** reflects benevolence in action, kindness which disposes one to do good but not a goodness qualitatively but a goodness in action and expressed in deed. **Goodness** is that temper or disposition which delights in contributing to the happiness of others, which is exercised cheerfully in gratifying their wishes and which supplies their wants or alleviates their distresses. **Goodness** is not just a sweet disposition but is a serving trait.

Here are the 10 uses of chrestotes in the NT - Rom. 2:4; 3:12; 11:22; 2 Co. 6:6; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 2:7; Col. 3:12; Titus 3:4

**Trench** (Synonyms of the NT) describes **chrestotes** as a

"beautiful word, as it is the expression of a beautiful grace... one pervading and penetrating the whole nature, mellowing there all which would have been harsh and austere (**Ed note**: this latter applicable only to men but not to God for He is never harsh or austere)... a goodness which has no edge, no sharpness in it... "

**One** ([1520](#)) (**heis**) is the cardinal number one.

**None who does good** (Click study of "good works" from a Biblical perspective) in the sense of doing anything of spiritual/eternal value.

**Isaiah** phrases it this way (notice he did not say "all of you" but rightly included himself)...

For **all of us** have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;** (literally "menstruous cloths") and **all of us** wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:4)

**Paul** explains how it is possible for man to do **'good works'** writing...

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship (**poiema** gives us our English word "**poem**"), created in Christ Jesus (2Cor 5:17-note = created to live a brand new style of life) for **good works**, (although we're not saved by good works, we are saved for good works) which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (instead of walking "according to the prince of the power of the air... in the lust of our flesh" Eph 2:2-3). (Eph 2:8-9-note, Eph 2:10-note)

Writing to Titus **Paul** explained that Jesus...

gave Himself for (huper = preposition of substitutionary atonement = "for the sake of, in behalf of, instead of") us, that He might redeem (lutroo = release or set free as a slave set free by paying the ransom price) us from (apo = indicates effective removal from that sphere and our deliverance from "all" aspects of its domination) every lawless deed (1Jn 3:4 defines lawlessness = sin) and purify for Himself a people for His own possession (KJV = "peculiar" but not "odd" or "strange" = we are no longer our own but we are His possession now), zealous (zelotes from the root verb zeloo = to boil, be hot or glow = 'Am I "afire" for Jesus?) for good deeds. (Titus 2:14-note)

Obviously men do "**good**" things (certainly relative to bad things that other men do), but they do not do them consistently, profoundly or with pure motivation. A **good** work must not only conform to the commandments of God, it must come from a heart committed to honoring Him, and no one habitually does this. Thus far Paul's "string of pearls" (charaz) is devastating. This is a sad commentary on the best that man has to offer God.

**James** explains the source of all "**good**" first warning us...

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. (James 1:16,17-note)

**Spurgeon** commenting on Ps 14:3 writes

"The Hebrew phrase is an utter denial concerning any mere man that he of himself does good. This is the verdict of the all-seeing Jehovah, Who cannot exaggerate or mistake. As if no hope of finding a solitary specimen of a good man among the unrenewed human family might be harbored for an instant"

**Spurgeon** commenting on the parallel verse (Ps 53:3) adds that the truth in this verse

"puts an end to the fictions of the innocent savage, the lone patriarch. The fallen race of man, left to its own energy, has not produced a single lover of God or doer of holiness, nor will it ever do so. Grace must interpose, or not one specimen of humanity will be found to follow after the good and true. This is God's verdict after looking down upon the race." (Treasury of David)

"**There is not up to one.**" Not even as far as one or to the point of one! Spurgeon commenting on Ps 14:3 writes that

"The Holy Spirit adds the crushing threefold negative **none ... no, not one**. What say the opponents of the doctrine of natural depravity to this? Rather what do we feel concerning it? Do we not confess that we by nature are corrupt, and do we not bless the sovereign grace which has renewed us in the spirit of our minds, that sin may no more have dominion over us, but that grace may rule and reign? (Treasury of David)

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**NO NOT ONE: AN ILLUSTRATION** -- The story is told of a man in Scotland who was walking through a park one Saturday afternoon, carrying a small New Testament in a leather case. Thinking the case contained a camera, a group of young people asked him to take their picture. In response, he said, "I already have it." When the astonished youths asked him where and when he had taken it, he took out the Testament and read [Romans 3:9-23](#). After saying, "That is your picture," he took the opportunity to witness to them about Christ.

**Romans 3:13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS" (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** eos enos taphos aneogmenos (RPPMSN) ho larynx (throat) auton tais glossais auton edoliusan (3PIAI) ios aspidon hupo ta cheile auton

**Amplified:** Their throat is a yawning grave; they use their tongues to deceive (to mislead and to deal treacherously). The venom of asps is beneath their lips. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** "Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their speech is filled with lies." "The poison of a deadly snake drips from their lips." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit'; 'the poison of asps is under their lips' ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Their throat is a grave that stands open. With their tongues they continually were deceiving. Asps' poison is under their lips

**Young's Literal:** A sepulchre opened is their throat; with their tongues they used deceit; poison of asps is under their lips.

**THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE (open sepulchre, KJV): eos enos taphos aneogmenos (RPPMSN) ho larygx (throat) auton:**

- Jer 5:16; Mt 23:27,28
- Romans 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

In Romans 3:13-18 note how various parts or members of the body (which are neutral in and of themselves) are involved in sin.

[Ps 5:9](#) "There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue." (**NASB**)

Ps 5:9 "For there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain; their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit." **Septuagint (LXX)**

**Paul** quotes from Psalm 5 where David writes that

There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue. ([Ps 5:9](#))

To man's "hoof" problem, David exposes man's "mouth" problem, with special application to his slick-talking enemies, describing them as flatterers, whose words of praise are really a means of serving themselves rather than the one they are praising. And because praise appeals to human nature, it also leads the flattered person into pride and false self-confidence. A flatterer therefore both uses and abuses others.

**C H Spurgeon** commenting on (Ps 5:9) writes

"This description of depraved man has been copied by the apostle Paul (Romans 2), together with some other quotations, as an accurate description of the whole human race, not of David's enemies only. **An open sepulcher.** A sepulcher is full of loathsomeness, pestilence and death, and an **open sepulcher** has all its evil gases issuing to spread death and destruction all around. So with the **throat** of the wicked, it would be a great mercy if it could always be closed. All the wickedness of their heart exhales. How dangerous is an **open sepulcher**; men in their journeys might easily stumble therein, and find themselves among the dead. Take heed of the wicked man, for there is nothing that he will not say to you; he will long to destroy your character, and bury you in the hideous **sepulcher** of his own wicked throat. One sweet thought here, however: there will be a resurrection not only of bodies, but characters. This should be a great comfort to a man who has been abused and slandered (see Matthew 13:43). The world may think you vile, but if you have been upright, in the day when the graves give up their dead, this **open sepulcher** of the sinner's throat will be compelled to give up your heavenly character, and you will be honored in the sight of men. They **flatter with their tongue.** A smooth tongue is a great evil; there are human anteaters that with their long tongues covered with oily words entice the unwary and make their gain thereby." (Treasury of David)

**Throat** ([2995](#)) (**larugx**) is the larynx, the organ of voice.

**Open** ([455](#)) (**anoigo** from **ana** = up/again + **oigo** = open) means to open up or open again. The idea is to open what is closed, as in Matthew where we read

the tombs were **opened**; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised (Mt 27:52)



**Anoigo** is in the **perfect tense** indicating that the grave has been opened at some point and that it remains open. It speaks of a permanent condition.

**Grave** ([5028](#)) (**taphos**) means a site or receptacle for interment as a grave, tomb or sepulchre.

Most NT uses of **taphos** are of a literal burial place but Paul's use is clearly figurative, Thayer's Lexicon noting that...

their speech threatens destruction to others, it is death to someone whenever they open their mouth

**Taphos** is used 7 times in the **NAS** (Matt 23:27, 29; 27:61, 64, 66; 28:1; Ro 3:13) and is translated in the NAS as grave, 5; tombs, 2 and in the KJV as sepulchre, 6; tomb, 1.

**Taphos** is found 40 times in the Septuagint (LXX)-

Ge 23:4, 20; 47:30; Jdg 8:32; 16:31; 1 Sam 10:2; 2 Sam 2:32; 3:32; 4:12; 17:23; 19:37; 21:14; 1Kgs 13:22, 30f; 2Kgs 9:28; 13:21; 21:26; 22:20; 23:6, 16, 30; 2 Chr 21:20; 24:25; 28:27; 32:33; Neh 3:16; Job 5:26; 6:10; 21:32; Ps 5:9; 14:3; 49:11; 68:6; 88:5, 11; Eccl 8:10; Jer 8:1; 20:17; Ezek 37:13; Matt 23:27, 29; 27:61, 64, 66; 28:1

Jesus used **taphos** in his denunciation of the Jewish religious leaders declaring...

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed **tombs** (**taphos**) which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. (Mt 23:27)

**Robertson** says;

"Their mouth (words) is like the odor of a newly opened grave."

**Shedd** says that

'Some portions of Greek and Roman literature stink like a newly opened grave.'

Sounds like modern day fare offered on regular and cable television, not to mention the internet!

Tombs were sealed not only to show respect for the deceased, but to hide the sight and stench of the body's decay. The full import of this picture can only be appreciated in hot climates like the middle east. Imagine the effect of the oppressive heat on decaying flesh! An ugly picture is being painted. As an unsealed tomb allows those who pass to see and smell what is inside, the unregenerate man's **open** throat—that is, the foul words that come from it—reveal the decay of his heart.

For example Solomon says that

"The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, but the perverted tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked, what is perverted." (Pr 10:31, 32)

"The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly." (Pr 15:2)

"The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." (Pr 15:28)

Jesus addressing the "super religious" (but sans relationship with God) Pharisees said

"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil." ([Mt 12:34, 35](#)).

**Warren Wiersbe** calls Romans 3:13-18 "an X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot."

**William Newell** comments that here through Paul

God speaks as the all-wise, holy Physician, in diagnosis: Their throat is an open sepulchre. Doctors always insist first on looking down our throats: and we all know that the throat and tongue denote the state of health. There could be nothing more horrible than what we have here: death, decay, moral stench, and that not hidden, but open! Unhidden, unashamed putridity:-thus a holy God describes the throat of every one of us by nature! As Bishop Howe says: "**Emitting the noisome exhalations of a putrid heart.**" We must remember we are here seeing man through God's all-holy eyes." ([Romans: Verse by Verse](#))

**Ray Pritchard** explains that...

Our speech has the smell of death about it because there is nothing but death inside us. Is this why we talk about "dirty" jokes and "gutter language?" And is it a coincidence that so many of our "dirty" words have to do with human excrement and perverted sex? Is this not a reflection of the decay inside the human heart? Why do we love "dirty" talk and double entendres? Why do children love trash talk? Because inside your heart is a rotting corpse, and the stench of it comes out of your mouth. Do you doubt that the human mouth is filled with cursing and bitterness? If so, then try this little experiment. Take a walk down the street and punch the first stranger you meet right in the nose. Then pay attention to what comes out of his mouth! (Then run for your life!) (Read the full sermon [Romans 3:9-20: The Man in the Mirror](#))

#### WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING: tais glossais auton edoliousan (3PIAI):

- Ro 3:4; Ps 5:9; 12:3,4; 36:3; 52:2; 57:4; Isa 59:3; Jer 9:3, 4, 5; Ezek 13:7; Mt 12:34,35; Jas 3:5, 6, 7, 8
- Romans 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Ps 5:9 There is nothing reliable in what they say; Their inward part is destruction itself; Their throat is an open grave; They flatter with their tongue.

Ps 12:3 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things;

Ps 12:4 Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"

Ps 36:3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good.

Ps 52:2 Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.

Ps 57:4 My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword.

Paul is quoting verbatim from the Septuagint (LXX) of Psalm 5:9 ([see above](#))

**Tongues (1100) (glossa)** is a member of the body, specifically the organ of speech and taste.

I am your tongue! I am an important fellow. The Bible mentions me about 215 times (Pr. 18:21; 21:23, etc.). When I speak kind, thoughtful and true words, there is happiness; when I speak mean, untrue, angry or complaining words, there is trouble.

**George Sweeting** speaking of the power of the tongue wrote...

Bernard of Clairvaux spoke, and thousands left all their earthly goods for the Second Crusade. Patrick Henry's immortal words, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" inspired a nation to fight furiously for liberty. Young William Jennings Bryan came to the 1896 Democratic National Convention simply as an alternate delegate. As he spoke to the great throng of delegates there, he lifted them out of their seats with his oratory and was acclaimed their nominee for the presidency of the United States. The tongue is powerful.

One slogan used during World War II was, "a slip of the lip may sink a ship." I have a picture of a South Pacific battle scene in which Marines are storming a beachhead. They are dropping everywhere. One Marine is wounded and bleeding. The picture bears a two-word title: Somebody Talked. It may be that the tongue has slain more than have all the bullets and bombs of battle. The book of Proverbs tells us that "A soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Pr 25:15b). And again we read, "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life" (Pr 13:3).

Edward Everett Hale in his story "The Man Without a Country" tells of the young naval officer, Philip Nolan, who with some others was on trial for being false to the service. As the court session dragged on and the trial came to a close, Nolan was asked if he wished to say anything to show that he had always been faithful to the United States. In a fit of temper he cursed and said, "I wish that I may never hear of the United States again!" The judge and the jury were shocked! In fifteen minutes they issued the verdict: "The Court decides, subject to the approval of the President, that you shall never hear the name of the United States again." Nolan laughed, but no one else laughed, and he became the man without a country. (Sweeting, G. Great Quotes & Illustrations)

**Deceiving (1387) (dolioo)** from **dolos** = deceit in turn from **délō** = bait and metaphorically guile, deceit) means to lure as by baiting a hook by covering it with a small piece of food to disguise its danger. When a fish bites the food, thinking he will get a meal, he instead becomes a meal for the fisherman. The idea then is that these men deal **deal treacherously** (likely to betray trust, providing

insecure footing or support, marked by hidden dangers, hazards, or perils) or use **fraud** (intentional perversion of truth in order to induce another to part with something of value or to surrender a legal right; fraud usually implies a deliberate perversion of the truth). They deceive by using trickery and falsehood.

Man's heart is deceptive, centuries earlier Jeremiah recording that

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

The **imperfect tense** of the verb pictures continual, repetitive deceit. Over and over again they deceive! Unfortunately, we've all experienced the poison of deceit. The imperfect tense also speaks of men persevering in their hypocritical speech.

The tongue can be a blessing  
Or the tongue can be a curse;  
Say, friend, how are you using yours:  
For better or for worse?

This verse is the only NT use of **doloo** while the Septuagint has 4 uses - Num. 25:18; Ps. 5:10; 13:3; 104:25

As **William Newell** reminds us "This includes your tongue and mine, reader." ([Romans 3](#))

For the unregenerate, natural man, lying and other forms of deceit come naturally and are a habitual, normal part of his life. Those little white lies, the way we erect facades, the way we claim to feel one way when we actually feel another; we think all this deceit is harmless and unnoticed. But God sees it.

**Vance Havner** once said "When I was a boy, the old country doctor came lumbering in with his bulging pill-bag and always began his examination by saying, "Let me see your tongue." It is a good way to begin the examination of any Christian. What we talk about is a good index to our character. Our speech betrays us."

#### THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS: ios aspidon hupo ta cheile auton:

- Dt 32:33; Job 20:14, 15, 16

Paul is quoting verbatim from the Septuagint of the **last half** of the following verse:

Ps 140:3 **They sharpen their tongues as a serpent. Poison of a viper is under their lips.** [Selah].

**Poison** (2447) (**ios** from **hiemi** = to send) is something sent out and one Greek meaning is thus arrow, a meaning not found in the NT.

**ios** is used in the NT to mean **poison** or **venom**. The idea is something that is emitted since venom is ejected or emitted from a serpent's fangs. **ios** also means **rust** as if emitted by metals.

**ios** is used 3 times in the NT (see below) and 7 times in the (Ps 14:3; 140:3; Pr 23:32; Lam 3:13; Ezek 24:6, 11, 12)

**James** uses **ios** with both meanings (poison and rust) writing...

(James 3:8) (Describing the **Tongue** James says that) "no one (Greek = absolutely no one. Have you ever tried?) can (dunamai = have power by virtue of inherent ability and resources) tame (reduce to stillness or quietness) the tongue; it is a restless (Unsettled, unsteady, unstable, staggering, reeling like a drunken man. Not having stability) evil and full of (replete, stuffed) deadly (literally death bringing) **poison** (**ios**). (James 3:8) (**Comment:** The tongue of an unregenerate man or even of a believer not controlled by the Spirit is like a deadly poisonous snake. The venomous evil chafes at confinement, always seeking a way to escape and to spread its deadly poison. This "poison" is more deadly than a snake's because it can destroy morally, socially, economically, and spiritually.)

(James 5:3) (Warning the materially rich James writes) Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their **rust** (**ios**) will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! (**Comment:** Here **rust** is a warning against heaping up worldly wealth. The rust will not merely rot this but will serve as a testimony against its owners and sear their flesh like fire. The point is not just that rust proves the transitoriness of riches but that it accuses the rich for letting things rot rather than give them to the poor!)

**Asps** (785) (**aspis**) describes a deadly serpent (Egyptian cobra) whose poison was contained in a bag under the lips!

In the Greek writings and in the Septuagint (LXX) **aspis** was also used to describe a round shield (Lat. clipeus, of bull's hide, overlaid with metal plates, with a boss in the middle, and fringed with tassel) but "shield" is clearly not the meaning in the present verse.

This is the only NT use of **aspis** but there are 17 uses in the Septuagint (LXX) (Deut. 32:33, 1Sa 17:6, 1Sa 17:45, 1 Chr. 5:18, 2Chr 9:16, Job 15:26, Job 20:14, Job 41:15, Ps 14:3, Ps 58:4, Ps 91:13, Ps 140:3, Isa 11:8, Isa 14:29, Isa 30:6, Isa 59:5, Jer 46:3)

**Vine** writes that **aspis** was...

a small and very venomous serpent, the bite of which is fatal, unless the part affected is at once cut away = metaphorically, of the conversation of the ungodly.

In describing **asps** William Newell writes that

"The fangs of a deadly serpent lie, ordinarily, folded back in its upper jaw, but when it throws up its head to strike, those hollow fangs drop down, and when the serpent bites, the fangs press a sack of deadly poison hidden "under its lips," at the root, thus injecting the venom into the wound. You and I were born with moral poison-sacks like this. And how people do claim the right to strike others with their venom-words! to use their snake-fangs!" ([Romans 3: Devotional and Expository](#))

**Lips** (5491) (**cheilos**) means the physical part of the mouth or can refer to language or dialect in some contexts as in the present verse.

This is a striking allusion to poison of asp which, like that of the common viper and other poisonous serpents, is lodged under the upper lip and at the inner end of two hollow fangs with which it bites and through which it infuses its venom.

How the world desperately needs to sing the song of the redeemed, like Frances Ridley Havergal who wrote...

***Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages for Thee.***

([Play hymn](#))

**Spurgeon** has the following comments on Ps140:3:

"**They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent.** The rapid motion of a viper's tongue gives you the idea of its sharpening it; even thus do the malicious move their tongues at such a rate that one might suppose them to be in the very act of wearing them to a point, or rubbing them to a keen edge. It was a common notion that serpents inserted their poison by their tongues, and the poets used the idea as a poetical expression, although it is certain that the serpent wounds by his fangs and not by his tongue. We are not to suppose that all authors who used such language were mistaken in their natural history any more than a writer can be charged with ignorance of astronomy because he speaks of the sun's traveling from east to west. **Adders' poison is under their lips.** The deadliest of all venom is the slander of the unscrupulous. Our text, however, must not be confined in its reference to some few individuals, for in the inspired epistle to the Romans it is quoted as being true of us all. The old serpent has not only inoculated us with his venom, but he has caused us to be ourselves producers of the like poison: it lies under our lips, ready for us, and, alas, it is all too freely used when we grow angry, and desire to take vengeance upon any who have caused us vexation. It is sadly wonderful what hard things even good people will say when provoked. O Lord, take the poison-bags away, and cause our lips to drop nothing but honey. Selah. This is heavy work. Go up, go up, my heart! Sink not too low. Fall not into the lowest key. Lift up thyself to God." (Treasury of David)

**Honey on the lips, poison under them.** Israel's first King, Saul, for example

"said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." (1Sa 18:17)

Saul used the phrase "fight the LORD'S battles" he knew that would appeal to David. And yet Saul's offer came out of a treacherous (likely to betray trust) heart, desiring not good but evil and calamity for David. How interesting to see the similarity between Saul's treachery and that of David with Uriah (read the tragic story in 1Samuel 11:1-15).

**Ray Stedman** says that **Poison... under their lips**

"is a picture of the tongue used to slander, to plant poison in another person's heart -- the put-down, the sharp, caustic words, the sarcasm that cuts someone off and depersonalizes another being. We are all guilty. This is what is inside, and this is what God sees with the realism of his eye." (Read full sermon [Romans 3:9-26: Peale or Paul?](#))

Paul's use of a snake also pictures sinful men as cunning and killing with their words. A minimum lethal dose of botulism bacillus is .00003 micrograms per kilogram of body weight. That is almost the equivalent of a flea derailing a 100 mile freight train. The venom of the tongue is probably not far removed in its killing power.

Because of the spiritually damning false doctrines and the deceitful character of most of the religious leaders in Jesus' day, both He and John the Baptist described them as broods of vipers.

"When (John the Baptist) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt 3:7).

As alluded to above, James writes that

"the **tongue** is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the **tongue** is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the **tongue** is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the **tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.** With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." (James 3:5-10)

There is a story of a man who found a baby rattlesnake and decided to make a pet of it. He kept it in the house and played with it for a week or so, but then it disappeared for several months and could not be found. One day the man reached behind a piece of furniture to retrieve something he had dropped. When he felt a sharp stab of pain, he pulled back his hand, with the rattler hanging from it by its fangs. Man's sinful nature is equally untamable.

Even those who belong to the Lord can succumb to terrible deceit. David, the divinely anointed king of Israel and a man after God's own heart, became enamored of Bathsheba when he happened to see her bathing. Although he was told she was married, he nevertheless summoned her to the palace and had sexual relations with her. When she became pregnant and notified David, the king flashed the fangs of deceit by inviting her husband, Uriah, to a sumptuous banquet, giving the impression that this man was a valued friend. But David was determined to have Bathsheba for his own wife, and the next morning he sent her husband to the battlefield with a sealed note to the commander that contained Uriah's own death warrant ([2Sa 11:1-15](#)).

In *The Pilgrims Progress* John Bunyan talked about "the parson of our parish, Mr. Two-Tongues." In that same congregation was Mr. Smooth-Man, Mr. Anything, and Mr. Facing-Two-Ways. These are all people of duplicity.

Even the famous have wicked tongues. The story is told of Winston Churchill who was a master at insulting with his tongue. It is well known that there was no love lost between he and Lady Astor. None was better at insults than Winston Churchill, who had no love affair with Lady Astor. On one occasion she found the great statesman rather obviously inebriated in a hotel elevator. With cutting disgust she snipped, "Sir Winston, you are drunk!" to which he replied, "M'lady, you are ugly. Tomorrow I will be sober."

On another occasion Churchill and Lady Astor engaged in verbal sparring when she told him, "If I were your wife, I'd put arsenic in your tea." He responded, "If I were your husband, I'd drink it."

### **Epitaph of our sinful "Tongue"...**

On a windswept hill in an English country churchyard stands a drab, gray slate tombstone. The quaint stone bears an epitaph not easily seen unless you stoop over and look closely. The faint etchings read:

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay,  
Lies Arabella Young,  
Who on the twenty-fourth of May,  
Began to hold her tongue

**William Norris**, the American journalist who specialized in simple rhythms that packed a wallop once wrote:

If your lips would keep from slips,  
Five things observe with care:

To whom you speak; of whom you speak;  
And how, and when, and where.

**Washington Irving** once wrote that...

The tongue is the only tool that grows sharper with constant use.

**Leonardo da Vinci said that...**

no member of our body needs so great a number of muscles as our tongue, for this member exceeds all the rest in the number of its movements.

**Publius**, a Greek sage observed,

"I have often regretted my speech, never my silence."

**Ray Stedman** adds that...

"When man refuses to bend his will to the will of God, it begins to affect his talk. You can tell it in the tone of his voice, in the words he chooses, in the biting sarcasm that comes forth, in the curses and bitterness, in the foulness of the tongue oftentimes, in the jealousy that is evident there." (Read full sermon [Romans 3:9-26: Peale or Paul?](#))