

Righteous God, Sinful Humankind (3:1–20)

In Rom. 1:18–3:20 Paul highlights the universal unrighteousness and sinfulness of humankind. The rottenness goes even deeper than what his lists of sins reveal: the human heart is “senseless” and “hard and impenitent” (1:21, 2:5). This discussion culminates in 3:1–20. Here Paul repeats his central claim: “We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin” (3:9). This is also the theme of the two quotations in 3:1–20. The first one is connected to the question of God’s righteousness in the face of human unrighteousness (3:4). The second quotation is presented as a single entity but factually consists of six different scriptural texts (3:10–18). The long catena substantiates Paul’s assertion that all are under sin.

I will approach these quotations by posing questions that fall into three categories, although often they are interrelated. First, while the first quotation follows the wording of the Septuagint, the origin of the second one poses a complex problem in need of careful textual analysis: what kind of source texts lie behind the catena, who brought them together, and has Paul himself modified their wording? In this chapter, close text-critical analysis plays a more significant role than in some others. Second, as already observed in the Introduction, in the process of quoting, certain words are disentangled from the framing elements that affect their meaning and are inserted into a new frame.¹ I will compare the original literary context of the quoted words with the new frame that Paul creates for them, examining both continuity and discontinuity. Third, I will describe the function the quotations have in Paul’s argumentation. What role do they play in it, which aspects of his own words do they possibly substantiate, and do they introduce new ideas or concepts into the discussion?

2.1 True God and Human Liar (3:4)

Romans 3 continues to develop the theme that Paul introduces in 1:18: the universal human unrighteousness that calls for judgement and that stands in sharp contrast with divine righteousness. Verses 3:1–8 consist of questions and answers and thus have a strong dialogical aspect, but the nature of the

¹ See pp. 26–27.

dialogue and of its individual questions is contested.² The tempo in the section is rapid: it begins with the theme of Jewish advantages, but proceeds swiftly through circumcision, God's faithfulness and human falsity, ultimately to theodicy. Since it is not self-evident how the scriptural quotation in verse 4 relates to these themes, the questions and answers preceding it need thorough discussion.

2.1.1 *The Context of the Quotation in Romans*

The section begins with a question that arises when Paul relativizes physical circumcision in 2:25–29: “Then what advantage does the Jew have, or what is the benefit of circumcision?” (3:1) Paul's answer is surprisingly positive (“Much in every way!”), but he does not name more than one advantage, although he later in the letter mentions others (9:4): “In the first place, they were entrusted (ἐπιστεύθησαν) with the utterances of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ).”³ Since Paul considers this an advantage, he clearly intends a positive interpretation: the Jewish people were entrusted with the scriptures and all their promises.⁴ Then Paul's argument takes a sudden turn: “If some were unfaithful (ἠπίστησαν), does their unfaithfulness (ἀπιστία) nullify God's faithfulness (τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ)?” (3:3) Paul deliberately plays with the πιστ-root here. The ἀπιστία of Jews probably encompasses connotations of both unfaithfulness (cf. the contrast with God's faithfulness) and unbelief as the lack of a positive holistic response to the gospel, which is how Paul usually applies the word in Romans.⁵ The question of God's faithfulness in the face of Jewish obduracy anticipates the main theme of Romans 9–11, but here Paul takes it up in a context in which the main issue is

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- 2 If the passage is seen as a dialogue between Paul and his interlocutor, which parts belong to Paul and which to his questioner? Cf. the differing analyses of Stowers 1984, 715 and Räisänen 1986c, 203. More broadly, estimations of the importance of these verses encompass as varied characterizations as “a digression” (Kuss 1963, 99), “a bridge” (Dunn 1988a, 130; 3:1–8), and “the key to Paul's argumentation” (Watson 2007, 219).
 - 3 Wright is probably right in arguing that “entrusting” contains the idea that Israel is to take care of and to pass on the utterances of God, thus serving as a mediator (Wright 2013a, 837–838). Yet his claim that Israel's “unfaithfulness” would mean its failure to pass on the utterances is unconvincing, for ἀπιστία is paralleled by ψεύστης and ἀδικία in the following verses.
 - 4 Barclay 2015b, 472. In contrast, Watson (2004, 70; 2007, 219) identifies τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ with the scriptural indictment of humankind; see below n. 17. While the general meaning of λόγια is ‘oracles’, in the Septuagint the word is used more broadly of utterances of God, also when referring to the law (cf. Ps. 11:7 [12:7 MT]; 106:11 [107:11 MT]; 118:172 [119:172 MT], for example). The word occurs particularly often in the Psalter.
 - 5 Cf. Rom. 4:20, 11:20, 23 (Cranfield 1975, 180; Räisänen 1986c, 189; Dunn 1988a, 132; Jewett 2007, 244). For Paul's understanding of πίστις in general, see the enlightening analysis of Morgan 2015, 212–306. According to Morgan (2015, 261), “Paul's main interest is in *pistis* as relationship-forming and power-mediating. As such, he sees *pistis* is dominantly an exercise of trust which involves heart, mind, and action.”