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Romans

**“Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;** Romans 3:13

In this verse and the next two verses come quotes from the One who created the human body. As the designer of man, God understands the intended use of the parts of the body and He also understands both what they can represent metaphorically and also how they can be misused.

In these three verses, the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth are noted in order and then the feet are mentioned. The order starts with the internal most part and works outward - throat, tongue, and lips. It then is summed up in the visible notation of the three combined - the mouth. It is as if we are visibly watching a person vomiting out wickedness.

After this will be noted the feet. Once the heart's wickedness is expelled from the mouth, the feet are used to carry it everywhere they go. The imagery is shocking when considered as intended. Verse 13 is a quote from the 5th Psalm, and is taken more specifically from the Greek translation of that Psalm known as the Septuagint. Noted below are the Hebrew (NKJV) and Greek (LXX) translations:

For there is no faithfulness in their mouth;
Their inward part is destruction;

Their throat is an open tomb;
They flatter with their tongue. (NKJV)
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. (LXX)

As with any quote from the Old Testament, the context needs to be considered. The quote is specifically speaking about "boasters" and "workers of iniquity" (v5) and "those who speak falsehood" and "the bloodthirsty and deceitful man" (v6). Therefore, this verse, as with the previous verses, is not intended as an all-encompassing indictment, but is directed to those who practice such ways.

The throat of these people is compared to an open grave. The grave is the repository for the dead. If the grave is left open, the stench of the decaying body is left uncovered and it affects everything around it. The words which proceed from such a person are intended to reduce anyone around to a nauseas state, even to despair.

At the same time as being a place from which stench and putridity arises, the grave is open to receive more corpses - even until it is filled. The mouth which speaks such abominations not only offends, it destroys and consumes. Because it does it will continue to put out a vile odor as those it receives begin to rot. This is the state of mind we are intended to see. Those who speak falsehood and who are bloodthirsty reek with wickedness, destroy others, and cause them to reek with their decay. It is a repetitious and increasing cycle which is never satisfied.

All of this proceeds from the heart, through the open throat, and then off the tongue. The symbolism of these body parts is so vivid and correct because God who designed them knows how easily they can be misused.

Life application: Our words have consequences. When they are used properly, they are edifying of others, honoring to ourselves, and glorifying of God. When they are used in a wrong manner, they cause harm to those who receive them and they will be used as a tool of judgment against us (Matthew 12:36). Let us determine in our hearts to use our words carefully and in a manner which is good and right, not in evil and wickedness.

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

Paul's next quote is from Psalm 10:7 -

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression;
Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

Under divine inspiration, Paul has amended David's words while maintaining the overall intent of what he was saying. Anyone who opens his mouth in deceit and oppression is himself a person of bitterness. The cursing of man can be accomplished in several ways and in different directions. Man can curse God who created Him. This can be done directly or indirectly. An attack against the unseen God or upon Jesus who reveals God would be a direct curse. A person who speaks against God's word indirectly attacks God because the word of God issues from Him.

An act of cursing God directly is found in Leviticus 24:10-23. The penalty for the one who did this was to be stoned to death.

Cursing can be against others as well. An example of this is found in 2 Samuel 16 when a man cursed King David as he fled from his son who had revolted against him -

Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. 2 Samuel 16:5, 6

The bitterness which Paul speaks of is rooted in the heart of man and pours out in his words. Jesus, while speaking to Israel's leaders showed us this in Matthew 12. There He revealed that we cannot disassociate what we say from who we are -

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. Matthew 12:33-35

Life application: Our words are a reflection of the state of our heart. How we speak about God, His word, and the things He has created reflect our relationship with Him. How we speak to and about others shows others our concern for those He has created and for whom He sent His Son to die. Although we have every right to speak out against evil and the perverse ways of the world, we need to ensure that our words rightly reflect the truth without promoting evil. Others are watching and evaluating us as Christians. And as Christians we represent Christ.

“Their feet are swift to shed blood;... Romans 3:15

This verse is taken first from Solomon in the book of Proverbs -

For their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed blood. Proverbs 1:16

Isaiah builds upon it in his writings as well -

Their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
Wasting and destruction are in their paths. Isaiah 59:7

The heart has shown its state - the words have come up from the throat, they have been shaped by the tongue and passed through the lips (v 13), from there they have issued from the mouth (v 14). Now the words are carried into action. The first recorded sin in the Bible outside of Eden was the murder of Abel by Cain. Adam's sin in Eden separated man from his Creator. Cain's sin in the fallen world separated man from man. Abel sacrificed animal life to his God for restoration; Cain sacrificed human life out of jealousy, leading to condemnation.

Within about 1600 years of Cain's crime, the world had become so wicked that God destroyed it by flood. The same pattern occurs time and again throughout the post-flood world. At the time of King Manasseh it says that he, "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord." 2 Kings 21:16

The world is once again at a state of such violence and degradation, that human life has little value. The process of abortion is a mill of death. Euthanasia has become an acceptable method of human disposal, murder rates in cities such as Chicago are higher than war deaths in Afghanistan. TV shows and newscasts are so filled with crime scenes that one cannot determine reality from Hollywood. All of this stems from the intent of the heart. Jeremiah rightly called out the words of the Lord as he looked at the world around him -

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17:9, 10

Life application: Yes, the Lord does search the heart and He is able to heal its desperately wicked state, but it takes moving from the fallen world to the risen Christ. Without this action, there can be no true peace. Take time to learn the following five verses which show how to make this move. Think about them and how you can rightly explain them to others. Then go and share the message -

- 1) There is none righteous, no, not one. Romans 3:10
- 2) ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23
- 3) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23
- 4) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8
- 5) For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Romans 10:13

Destruction and misery are in their ways; Romans 3:16

This verse is a quote from the second half of Isaiah 59:7 -

Their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;

Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
Wasting and destruction are in their paths.

The ways of those who reject God lead to "destruction and misery." The Greek word translated as "destruction" is *suntrimma* and this is its only use in the New Testament. It comes from the idea of dashing something to pieces. "Misery" comes from the Greek *talaiporia*, a word found only one other time in the Bible - James 5:1. It indicates a state of wretchedness.

It is evident that these words are not applicable to all people at all times. Rather they apply to a state of corruption which exists in the hearts of people and which is brought out when a denial of God exists. This is important to remember because, as was noted in a previous quote, these words cannot be found to imply that unregenerate man is unable to seek after God as Calvinism claims. These are generalities about humanity which can lead to specific extremes in humanity - such as Khan, Hitler, Stalin, etc.

The opposite is true as well. There are those who pursue peace who haven't been called by Jesus. Perhaps they refuse to bear arms against others or spend their lives ministering to others, even though they aren't saved believers. This is important to note in order to gain a proper understanding of how one comes to saving faith. It is often true that the worst offenders will see their need for Jesus before the one who is always helping others and doing good stuff.

The truly depraved person, when confronted with the truth of the gospel, may fully understand their condemned state and seek for pardon. The kind, gentle, and humble person when given the gospel may shun it because they feel they are already good enough and that the balances tip in their favor or maybe they are at the top of the bell curve.

Neither of these understandings would lead to the choice of accepting or rejecting the gospel without free-will. Instead, they would continue down their chosen path without a second thought. If man doesn't possess free will, the evil of the person described in today's verse would have to be traced back to the fall of man who didn't possess free will and thus the blame would be elevated back to the Creator; such is impossible as God is perfect and holy in all ways.

Therefore, the wicked state of those described by Paul is a personal choice acting upon the already corrupt state of man. It is a choice which is reflected in Matthew 7:13 - "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." Jesus asks us to make the right choice because the wrong one will end in the destruction and misery noted in this same verse.

Life Application: If you're struggling with the doctrine of free-will in man because you were originally instructed that you don't possess it, then think the issue through to its logical conclusion at the fall of man - ascribing the fall to God. The question is, "Do you have free will?" The reply - "Think it through and then you decide."