

Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God

(77)

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[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

(Continuation from 10/01/17)

F. God's Case Against All Men, [Romans 3:9-20](#)

[Romans 3:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

¹⁴“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.”

The apostle Paul was well aware of man's disposition to deny his sin. Therefore, from creation, from history; from reason and logic, and from conscience, Paul has already presented powerful testimony of man's sinfulness. Now he presents the ultimate testimony, the testimony of Scripture. Beginning with [verse 10](#) and continuing through [verse 18](#), Paul introduces before the court, as it were, the testimony of God's own Word as revealed in the Old Testament.

[Verses 9-20](#) summarize God's divine and perfect view of man and they continue in a trial motif: the arraignment ([v. 9](#)), the indictment ([vv. 10-17](#)), the motive ([v. 18](#)), and the verdict ([vv. 19-20](#)).

1. **The charge: all men are under sin (v.9).**
2. **The case of a sinful nature (v.10-12).**
3. **The case of a sinful tongue (v.13-14).**
4. **The case of sinful acts (v.15-18).**
5. **The case of the law (v.19-20).**

The **thirteen charges** of the indictment are presented in **three categories**—the first concerning **the character** ([vv. 10-12](#)), the second concerning **the conversation** ([vv. 13-14](#)), and the third concerning **the conduct** ([vv. 15-17](#)) of the accused.

3. ([Romans 3:13-14](#)) **Tongue— Man, Nature: there is the case of a sinful tongue.**

The Conversation of the Accused

[Romans 3:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

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A person's character will inevitably manifest itself in his conversation. Jesus declared that ³⁴ "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil" ([Matthew 12:34-35 NASB](#)).

On another occasion He taught the same truth in slightly different words: "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man" ([Matthew 15:18 NASB](#))

The writer of Proverbs said, "³¹ The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out. ³² The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted" ([Proverbs 10:31-32 NASB](#)).

He also wrote, "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly."... ([Proverbs 15:2 NASB](#)). "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things" ([Proverbs 15:28 NASB](#))

Continuing to quote from the Psalms, Paul illustrates the truths about a person's character as they are reflected in his conversation. In doing so, he adds four more charges to the divine indictment against the unregenerate man.

Commenting on Paul's use of human anatomy to illustrate how man's evil character manifests itself, one writer paraphrased the psalmist's and the apostle's words in this way: "*His tongue is tipped with fraud, his lips are tainted with venom, his mouth full of gall [bitterness],... his tongue a sword to run men through, and his throat a sepulchre in which to bury them.*"

The **seventh charge** of Paul's indictment is that by nature fallen mankind is spiritually dead, demonstrated by the metaphor of **their throat** being **an open grave** (c. [Psalm 5:9](#)). A spiritually dead heart can generate only spiritually dead words.

[Psalm 5:9 \(NASB\)](#)

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."

The **throat** is to the heart as **an open grave** is to the corpse within it. Where embalming is not available, a corpse is placed in the ground and then covered up—not only to show respect for the deceased but also to protect passersby from viewing the disfigurement and smelling the stench of decay. But the natural man keeps his throat wide open, and in so doing continually testifies to his spiritual death by the foulness of his words.

The **eighth charge** is that by nature fallen mankind is deceitful: **with their tongues they keep deceiving**. *Dolioō*, from which **keep deceiving** is derived, has the basic meaning of luring and was used of 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

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fisherman. The imperfect Greek tense of the verb indicates continual, repetitive deceit. For the natural man, lying and other forms of deceit are a habitual and normal part of his life.

Psalm 5:9 describes 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.

Psalm 5:9 (NASB)

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.”

David declares that man's sinfulness can also lead to self-deceit and self-flattery. “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; There is no fear of God before his eyes. ² For it flatters him in his *own* eyes Concerning the discovery of his iniquity *and* the hatred *of it*. ³ The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.” (**Psalm 36:1-3 NASB**)

Isaiah wrote, “Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken falsehood, Your tongue mutters wickedness” (**Isaiah 59:1-3 NASB**)

Jeremiah also exposed man's natural deceitfulness, saying of the wicked, “They bend their tongue *like* their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me,” declares the LORD. ⁴ Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, And do not trust any brother; Because every brother deals craftily, And every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. ⁵ Everyone deceives his neighbor And does not speak the truth, They have taught their tongue to speak lies; They weary themselves committing iniquity” (**Jeremiah 9:3-5 NASB**)

The **ninth charge** in Paul's indictment of the unconverted man is closely related to the previous one. Quoting from part of **Psalm 140:3**, he says of ungodly men that **the poison of asps is under their lips**.

Psalm 140:3 (NASB)

³“They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; **Poison of a viper is under their lips**. Selah.”

The psalmist precedes that charge with the observation that “they sharpen their tongues as a serpent.” 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 (**Matt. 3:7**; **12:34**).

Matthew 3:7 (NASB)

⁷“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for

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baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”

Matthew 12:34 (NASB)

³⁴“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”

In describing **asps**, one writer says, “The fangs of such a deadly snake ordinarily lie folded back in the upper jaw but when the snake throws his head to strike, these hollow fangs drop down, and when the snake bites, the fangs press a sac of deadly poison hidden under the lips, ejecting venom into the victim.”

I remember reading about 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 (see [2 Samuel 11:1-15](#)).

2 Samuel 11:1-15 (NASB)

¹“Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

²Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.

³So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

⁴David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, “I am pregnant.”

⁶Then David sent to Joab, saying, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So, Joab sent Uriah to David.

⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war.

⁸Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house, and wash your feet.” And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him.

⁹But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and

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did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ Now when they told David, saying, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?”

¹¹ Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing.”

¹² Then David said to Uriah, “Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you go.” So, Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.

¹³ Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord’s servants, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah.

¹⁵ He had written in the letter, saying, “Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

The **tenth charge** in the indictment continues the imagery of speaking, describing the ungodly as those **whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness** (see [Psalm 10:7](#)).

[Psalm 10:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ “His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.”

Ara (**cursing**) carries the idea of intense malediction, of desiring the worst for a person and making that desire public through open criticism and defamation. *Pikria* (**bitterness**) was not used so much in regard to physical taste as to describe openly-expressed emotional hostility against an enemy. Such is the obvious meaning in this context.

David described cursing, bitter persons as those “**who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow,** ⁴**To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear**” ([Psalm 64:3-4 NASB](#)).

Every age of mankind, our own certainly included, has been characterized by people who use their tongues as vicious weapons. Their attacks not only are against those they know well enough to hate but sometimes, as David seems to intimate, even against strangers, simply for the perverse pleasure of venting their anger and hatred.