

I'M THE BAD GUY?
UNIVERSAL HUMAN DEPRAVITY IN ROMANS 3:10-18

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Introduction

Youth pastors, budding apologists, and self-appointed warriors against the rising specter of secularism in the West alike have incorporated Ps 14:1 into their tool kit of prooftexts: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (ESV). A surface-level reading of the text might cause one to register the psalm as another “bad guy” text of which the psalter is full: those psalms which cry out to the Lord against, not simply the general mass of unbelievers, but the worst of the worst. While the above-quoted verse does not appear in Paul’s catena of OT quotations in Rom 3:10-18, the passage in which it is situated is present. There, Paul applies the description of those “fools” who reject the Lord to the whole lot of fallen humanity, Jew and Gentile alike – not simply the highest rank of offenders. The question arises, has Paul misused this text? This question can legitimately be raised for the entire string of quotations that Paul uses.

Paul quotes from six or seven OT passages, depending whether one considers Rom 3:10b to reflect a quotation of Eccl 7:20. In this paper, I will argue that the entire catena of Rom 3:10b-20 reflects an appropriate interpretation (not a “reinterpretation”) of its constitutive OT parts; consequently Paul’s use of these OT texts clarifies their meaning such that he shows that they all alike discuss the natural depravity of all humans, not just the most heinous. To advance this thesis, I will first give an overview of the passage as a whole, including its origin, structure, and the use of each OT quotation in particular. Second, I will look at the leading and lengthiest quotation of the catena: Ps 14:1-3 found in Rom 3:10b-12. In this section, I will argue that Paul’s use of Ps 14:1-3 reflects the full value of Ps 14:1-3 insofar as the unchecked, depraved condition of man is what fosters the societal breakdown evident in Ps 14:1-3, notwithstanding the existence of a righteous remnant.

Romans 3:10b-18: Origin and Structure

Most scholars do not consider the catena of Rom 3:10b-18 to be original to Paul. Similar strings of OT quotations are found in various Rabbinic sources.¹ Consequently, many conclude that Paul adapted the catena from a prior Jewish source,² although others believe the catena to be an early Christian liturgical form.³ To be sure, it was standard practice for Rabbis to string together OT quotes without introducing each individually.⁴ No doubt, Paul's Jewish influence shines through in this case. But is it necessary to attribute the catena's production to someone other than Paul himself? The catena does not appear in any extant Jewish or Christian literature prior to Paul.⁵ Even those scholars who deny Paul composed the catena will highlight its thematic connections to Paul's prior argument.⁶ Perhaps the "catchword" *δικαιος* in the opening line is what Paul drew to the catena to begin with.⁷ Moreover, the middle section discussing sins of speech and deed in 3:13-16 matches closely with 1:29-31,⁸ and the idea of "no one understand[ing]" closely parallels 1:21-22.⁹ Ultimately, these strong thematic connections between the catena and Paul's preceding argument, coupled with the absence of any concrete

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, WBC 38A (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 145. It must be said that the parallel between Rom 3:10b-18 and 4 Ezra 7:22-24 that Dunn cites is simply conceptual, the latter not being a string of OT quotations but simply an extended reflection on human iniquity.

² Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 254. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 334.

³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC 1 (T&T Clark, 1986), 192.

⁴ Cranfield, *Romans*, 192.

⁵ Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 616. It is worth noting that the catena in its entirety appears verbatim in some LXX manuscripts (Jewett, *Romans*, 254). However, in all likelihood, the quotations were simply added to post-NT manuscripts by Christian scribes.

⁶ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 334. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 254, 257. Fitzmyer and Jewett both put forward the suggestion that the catena, having its origins in a pre-Pauline source, marks "the theological starting point" for Paul's reflections on human depravity. But might it not be that the cart has been placed before the horse – that Paul's views of universal human sinfulness, informed by the sum teaching of the OT, led him to weave together those OT quotations to drive home his point more forcefully?

⁷ Richard B. Hays, "Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3," *JBL* 99 (1980): 112.

⁸ Seifrid, "Romans," 617.

⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 260.

evidence for the catena's existence prior to Paul, leads us to conclude that Paul is in fact the compiler.¹⁰

How does the catena function in Paul's broader theological argument? Having previously demonstrated that both Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:1-3:8) are under sin,¹¹ 3:10b-18 stands as his closing statement. And a mighty closing statement it is, and not simply for rhetorical effect. The catena is situated as Paul's last note because it represents his strongest evidence for universal depravity: Scripture itself. Whereas up to this point, "he had hitherto used proofs or arguments to convince men of their iniquity; he now begins to reason from authority; and it is to Christians *the strongest kind of proof*, when authority is derived from the only true God."¹² Paul's abjectly dire view of human nature is "no private opinion but well-grounded in Holy Writ."¹³ Indeed, the passage stands as the lengthiest quotation of Scripture in all of Paul's letters.¹⁴

A brief word on the structure of the catena is also in order. Several attempts for distilling the catena's literary and thematic structure have been made, the most common being to divide the catena by strophe. Cranfield divides it into three strophes, with vv. 10-12 the most general, vv. 13-14 discussing speech, and vv. 15-18 discussing conduct.¹⁵ Dunn rejects the strophe structure as "hardly self-evident," preferring organization in accordance with the six-fold

¹⁰ Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, 150.

¹¹ For a brief rationale that Paul's discussion (attack) of the Jews' own failure to keep God's law begins at 2:1, see Guy Prentiss Waters, "Romans," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 183.

¹² Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 125. Emphasis is my own.

¹³ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 162. See also G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 73. Beale adds that the formula "as it is written" indicates the abiding authority of the OT in the New Testament age: human depravity as described in the OT remains just as true and just as widespread.

¹⁴ Seifrid, "Romans," 616.

¹⁵ Cranfield, *Romans*, 191. See also William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 120.

repetition of οὐκ ἔστιν.¹⁶ While this repetition is better categorized as a striking literary aspect rather than an organizing principle, Fitzmyer does reasonably propose that organization should be based around the general downward movement the catena traverses with respect to the human body: from throat to tongue, to lips, to mouth, to feet – then back up to the eyes in 3:18. And this latter approach seems the better way, as the catena is ultimately not a poetic composition in its own right but an onslaught of OT quotations intended to overwhelm the stubborn reader, showing that from head to toe, mankind is inherently devoted to sin.¹⁷ Moreover, placing the focus of the catena on the ways man devotes his whole being (body) to sin aligns well with identifying 3:10b-12 as an introductory statement¹⁸ (since it does not mention any parts of the body) and 3:18 as a concluding statement (since it disrupts the downward movement in its discussion of the “eyes,” as well as returning to the οὐκ ἔστιν motif).

Romans 3:10b-18: General Content

The catena comes on the heels of Paul’s declaration in 3:9a that “we” are not any “better off.”¹⁹ While the identity of this “we” is not explicit, it is generally agreed that Paul is referring to the Jews.²⁰ While Paul then repeats the charge that Jew and Gentile alike are “under sin” (ὕφ’ ἁμαρτιαν), the fact that he begins the pericope with a reiteration that Jews are not in fact better than the Gentiles leads us to conclude that it is the Jews whom he first has in mind in his consequent appeal to Scripture. He cites a striking variety of texts, which are listed as follows: Rom 3:10-12 / Ps 14:1-3,²¹ Rom 3:13a / Ps 5:9, Rom 3:13b / Ps 140:3, Rom 3:13 / Ps 10:7, Rom 3:15-17 / Isa 59:7-8, and Rom 3:18 / Ps 36:1. But what is further striking is that this variety of

¹⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, 145. Fitzmyer concurs (*Romans*, 334).

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 334.

¹⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 103.

¹⁹ A more literal translation of προεχομεθα might be simply, “Are we better?”

²⁰ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 164. See also Calvin, *Commentaries*, 124; Hendriksen, *Exposition*, 120. The ESV and RSV both supply “Jews” in their translations to clarify the interpretation of the translators.

²¹ Below, I will argue against viewing 3:10b as a quotation of Eccl 7:20, as some have suggested.

texts finds among themselves a core thematic unity: they all alike stem from meditations on “the wicked,” those who are defined by their flagrant disregard for the law and covenant of God. This thematic unity can be shown in short order.

The specifics of Ps 14:1-3²² will be discussed in further detail below, but a few remarks can be made presently. The psalm, more than any other passage cited in Paul’s catena, speaks in the most general terms describing human depravity. Verse 2 describes The LORD searching amongst the **בְּנֵי-אָדָם** (appropriately translated by the ESV as “children of man”) to see if there are any who seek God. That David here uses the more general **אֱלֹהִים** rather than the covenantal **יְהוָה** perhaps indicates the search for a general pious bent and, hence, a lower bar being set. None is found – and thus, David muses “There is none who does good, not even one” (Ps 14:3). Even so, this meditation opens with the thesis that it is the **נָבָל** (fool) who denies God. This opening statement might well condition the reader to conclude that David is only speaking of those outside the covenant in 14:3. On this view, there is “not even one” *outside the covenant* who does good. Psalm 14:4’s declaration that these evildoers eat up God’s people seems to confirm that an implicit covenantal distinction is in view (14:4). The concluding plea for deliverance for salvation (presumably from the wicked) (14:7) could well confirm this reading.

Romans 3:13a is a word-for-word quotation of the Septuagint’s translation of Ps 5:9. There is a minor difference between the Hebrew and the Septuagint in that the verb **חָלַק** (“to be smooth, or in this case, “to flatter”²³) is translated into Greek as *ἐδολιουσαν* (“they deceive”). But of course, all flattery is inherently deceptive. The psalm as a whole is David’s plea for

²² Being ungermane to the topic of this paper – Paul’s hermeneutical use of the OT – the connection between Pss 14 and 53 will not be explored.

²³ William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 106.

deliverance from those who would seek to destroy him – it is these “enemies” mentioned in verse 8 who are the referent of verse 9’s content. The same is true of Ps 140:3, the Septuagint version being quoted verbatim in Rom 3:13b. There, also, we see in the psalm David’s plea for deliverance from “evil men” under whose lips is the venom of asps. Likewise, in Ps 10:7, quoted in Rom 3:14,²⁴ the wicked who oppress the poor are the ones whose mouths are filled with curses and bitterness. There are minor differences of detail, but each of the three psalms that Paul pulls from in vv. 13-14 all alike concern the psalmist’s meditation on the evil speech of the enemies of God’s people.

Isaiah 59:7-8 is the next passage quoted in Rom 3:15-17. With a few minor changes,²⁵ Paul abbreviates the passage by selecting verbatim quotations from the Septuagint. In this passage, the dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked is less apparent. The context of the chapter makes it a good candidate for inclusion in Paul’s catena, for it depicts a situation in the covenant community in which iniquity is thoroughgoing. In Isa 59:1-3, the prophet addresses the people of God directly as a whole, informing them that “your (plural) iniquities” have caused a separation between them and God. In 59:4, Isaiah declares that there is “no one” behaving lawfully in the courts. From there, the discourse shifts to third-person description, categorizing this group’s destructive acts until we come to the passage quoted in Rom 3:15-17. The passage thus reflects a broader view of human depravity than is found in the other passages which are founded on a stronger division between the righteous and wicked.

²⁴ The quotation is not verbatim from the Septuagint, but the only differences are a difference in word order and a change from singular αὐτοῦς to plural ὧν for purposes of grammatical cohesion with the rest of the catena.

²⁵ Specifically, he changes τρεχουσιν ταξινοῖ in LXX Isa 59:7a to ὄξεις in Rom 3:15a and ὀιδάσσιν in Isa 59:8b to ἐγνώσαν in Rom 3:17.

Paul's final OT quotation is Ps 36:1, found in Rom 3:18.²⁶ Again, David speaks of “the wicked” (רָשָׁע), While the psalm contains references to the corrupt nature of the wicked's speech and life (Ps 36:3-4), Paul instead highlights the absence of the “fear of God” in the wicked. The Hebrew word פָּחַד might better be translated as “dread” (suggesting, perhaps, that even a base dread of God's power cannot be found in the wicked) in distinction from the more standard יִרְאָה, but this nuance is flattened by the Septuagint's translation of φόβος, the general word for fear. But while the פָּחַד אֱלֹהִים might describe a crasser sort of fear in other OT passages, scholars agree that in Ps 36:1, it signals a fundamental lack of piety, the absence of the necessary foundation for wisdom (Prov 1:7).²⁷ Indeed, “the fear of God is the soul of godliness and its absence the epitome of impiety.”²⁸ In this sense, the verse is an appropriate end to Paul's catena, as it summarizes the human iniquity that he has just been portraying in more concrete detail. Even so, in the context of the psalm itself, “the wicked” appears to stand not for the fallen lump of humanity as a whole but a specific breed of sinner who causes particular harm to the believer, the “type of individual that every faithful follower of God encounters somewhere along life's path.”²⁹

We have, then, in the catena a series of OT quotations whose contexts show a degree of variance respecting the identity of the accused. Overall, the catena “merges the prophetic charge against the people of God with the complaint of the psalmist against their enemies.”³⁰ Even so, the overall context of the passages cited leans strongly towards the latter. All the psalm citations in their original contexts are founded upon an assumed “antithesis between the righteous (the

²⁶ Again, the passage in Rom 3:18 is a verbatim quote of the Septuagint.

²⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1 - 50*, WBC 19 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 292.

²⁸ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 105.

²⁹ Rolf A. Jacobson, “Psalm 36: In Your Light, We See Light,” in *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 340.

³⁰ Seifrid, “Romans,” 617.

faithful member of the covenant) and the unrighteous.”³¹ Isaiah 59:7-8 is the only passage where the covenant community as a whole is being charged. Moreover, such prophetic charges presuppose the existence of a faithful remnant. So then, does Paul’s utilization of the passages in question reflect a reinterpretation? Can his use of them be squared away with the original intent of the human author? We will now turn to a closer examination of Ps 14:1-3 to address this question.

Paul’s Use of Psalm 14:1-3

Paul’s use of Ps 14:1-3 does not reflect as clean a quotation as can be found in the other OT passages. This need not concern the inerrantist exegete, as the need to cite sources precisely was not “a customary practice in antiquity.”³² Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at the raw data of the text itself for purposes of assessing Paul’s hermeneutical use of it. Starting from the middle, Rom 3:11 twice supplies the negative οὐκ to Ps 14:2b, answering in the negative the implied question that the LORD is asking in his search for a man who does good – a negative answer which the psalmist himself clearly endorses in 14:3. Additionally, Paul supplies two articles (neither of which is found in the MT or the LXX) in 3:11-12, which function as relative pronouns.³³ There is also a minor text-critical issue, concerning the absence in some manuscripts of the second οὐκ ἐστίν in 3:12 (which phrase is present in both the MT and the LXX), but Metzger considers that it was simply deleted as superfluous.³⁴

³¹ Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, 145.

³² Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 108.

³³ Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 96.

³⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament*. 3rd ed. (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 448–49. Metzger adds that given the weight of those witnesses that omit the phrase (B 1739 syr^p Origen), it was placed in brackets in the UBS.

Of course, the more pressing issue is what to do with the curious v. 10: οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς. There is greater difference here than in the rest of the psalm citation, with the Septuagint reading in 14:1b: οὐκ ἔστιν ποιῶν χρηστοτητα, οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως ἑνός. What most stands out here is a change from “there is none who does good” in the LXX to “[there is none] righteous.” The change from goodness/kindness³⁵ to righteousness reflects a “specifically Pauline interest.”³⁶ Consequently, various scholars think that Paul is drawing on Eccl 7:20, given its statement that “there is not a righteous man” on earth.³⁷ There is certainly merit to the notion that Paul assimilated a quotation of Eccl 7:20 into his catena – and to be fair, both LXX Eccl 7:20 and Rom 3:10b contain the wording οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος. However, what cannot be denied is 3:10b’s close relationship to 3:11-12; this relationship is preserved in the catena if we regard 3:10b as a translation of Ps 14:1b.³⁸ There is good reason to think this to be so. The Hebrew טוֹב and the Greek δίκαιος have substantial conceptual overlap, as טוֹב can at times have covenantal import, though more when coupled with דִּרְרָה.³⁹ Even so, this nuance to טוֹב lends credence to the notion that there is a covenantal/legal angle to עֲשֵׂה-טוֹב in Ps 14:1b, which Paul opted to clarify with his own translation of δίκαιος.⁴⁰ We can then be confident that Paul is quoting from Ps 14:1-3 as a whole, rather than just 14:2-3 (perhaps being influenced by Eccl 7:20 in his translation decision).

³⁵ Moisés Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:685.

³⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 257.

³⁷ Cranfield, *Romans*, 192. See also Seifrid, “Romans,” 616. Dunn also agrees that 3:10b is much closer to Eccl 7:20, adding that the “somewhat jaundiced” view of Qoheleth matches well with Paul’s own concerns with Jewish nationalistic self-righteousness (*Romans 1 – 8*, 150).

³⁸ The LXX adds οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως whereas the Hebrew has no such statement. The absence of brackets indicates that the translators do not regard it to be a Christian interpolation like the insertion of the catena after 14:3. It is just as possible that it was added for purposes of harmonizing 14:1b with 14:3b.

³⁹ I. Höver-Johag, “טוֹב,” in vol. 5 of *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 311.

⁴⁰ See Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 1:727, which argues that “the standard of righteousness is not provided simply by custom, but is rather seen against the wider background of the covenant relationship with Yahweh.”

The opening reference to the “fool” must be dealt with in order to assess Paul’s use of the psalm. Reference to this נָבֵל is noticeably absent from Paul’s incorporation of the psalm’s opening. This absence, coupled with the omission of vv. 4-7 which speaks of “my people” and the “righteous generation” (both referring to the faithful covenant community) has led to the conclusion that Paul has jettisoned the psalm’s contrast between the righteous and the wicked.⁴¹ To some degree this is true insofar as one of Paul’s goals is to demonstrate not only that scripture condemns all humankind but also that “scripture which had been read from the presupposition of a clear distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous in fact condemned all humankind as soon as that clear distinction was undermined.”⁴² This observation is true and good, but it does not mean David would reject Paul’s doctrine of universal human depravity; nor does it mean that Paul would forego the prominent distinction of the righteous and the wicked in the psalter.

The key to understanding Paul’s use of Ps 14:1-3 lies in how exactly we understand the opening reference to the fool in v. 1 and the subsequent reflections on humanity broadly construed. It is curious that David opts to speak of a נָבֵל, being a different word than the word for “fool” that Proverbs often uses.⁴³ A נָבֵל is generally defined as one with moral deficiencies, rendering him impervious to correction.⁴⁴ The נָבֵל is devoid of any influence or recognition of God, hence his statement that “there is no God.”⁴⁵ It is relevant that, whereas most English translations supply a definite article, there is none in the Hebrew. Perhaps the article’s absence (where we might expect it) can be attributed to the writer’s preference to speak of נָבֵל not as a distant archetype but a common occurrence in the covenant community – anyone who rejects the

⁴¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 254.

⁴² Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, 149.

⁴³ Rolf A. Jacobson, “Psalm 14: Not a Stop-Gap God,” in *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 166.

⁴⁴ Robert A. Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs in Psalm 14=53 - *nābāl* and *’esāh*,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 16.

⁴⁵ Craigie, *Psalms 1 - 50*, 147.

fear of the LORD might one day find himself a נָבֵל. This possibility becomes all the more alarming when we realize that the OT reserves the נָבֵל label for those who commit the most serious offenses.⁴⁶

The implied connection between 14:1a and 14:2-3b is that Jewish society writ large has become a nation of fools: 14:1-3, then, is a commentary on the actions and twisted inward bent of the נָבֵל.⁴⁷ But is the infestation total and complete? This can be construed as a problem, given that vv. 1-3 appears to teach universal human iniquity whereas vv. 4-7 presents a righteous-wicked divide. This problem, if there is indeed one, can be solved either by appealing to the tendency of wisdom literature to deal in dualistic comparisons⁴⁸ or to “recognize that the psalmist with his ‘all’ was not making a doctrinal statement about the human condition” but instead a social analysis of his own day.⁴⁹ But if this is so, what do we make of Paul’s use of the psalm in Rom 3, where it is necessary that οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως ἑνός must necessarily and literally mean, “there is not even one”?

This is not a problem that only the modern interpreter must grapple with. Paul’s own original readers, particularly Jewish ones, might well have recognized that he was lumping them in with pagan idolators⁵⁰ and objected that he was misapplying these texts. This objection seems to be addressed implicitly in Paul’s statement in 3:19, “whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law.”⁵¹ Paul’s use of νόμος in this case reflects not just the Mosaic law but the

⁴⁶ Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs in Psalm 14=53 - Nābāl and ’esāh,” 16.

⁴⁷ Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs in Psalm 14=53 - Nābāl and ’esāh,” 18.

⁴⁸ Jacobson, “Psalm 14,” 166.

⁴⁹ James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 82. See also Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapid, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1970), 1:204.

⁵⁰ Dunn, *Romans 1 - 8*, 150.

⁵¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 333. See also Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 169.

OT as a whole.⁵² Hence, his statement in verse 19 can be loosely paraphrased, “When the Old Testament discusses these things [rampant iniquity], it says them with reference to those who are under its stipulations!” Paul’s awareness of this reply is crucial because it indicates that he is operating with the awareness that his use of these quotations differs from a surface level reading.

Even so, his use of all the OT texts, and Ps 14:1-3 in particular, coheres well with the foundational principle behind each of them. Of course, it is important to clarify that we are not seeking to prove that David and Paul shared a uniform intent in their respective authoring and utilization of these texts.⁵³ Rather, given our commitment to a divine author (which is presupposed in this paper!), it is not necessary to prove that David wrote Ps 14 explicating the exact point of universal depravity that Paul was arguing for – only that Paul’s point can be subsumed under the “full value” of Ps 14.⁵⁴ Paul’s main point in the catena and Rom 1-3 as a whole is to describe humans “left to themselves” apart from any intervention of the special grace of God.⁵⁵ Were God to abstain from his gracious involvement in human affairs, all alike would flail in complete moral depravity, which is the picture we find in Ps 14:1-3. It is true that 14:5 allows for the presence of a “righteous generation,” but this is ultimately not germane to Paul’s argument. For in Paul’s catena, we have yet to reach 3:21 where the righteousness of God finally is made manifest, which is itself what fosters the very existence of a righteous remnant at all! But for the grace of God, all would be enslaved sin, and as David shows in Ps 14, many who are devoid of the grace of God consequently are. But since the grace of God has been bestowed on all who are in Christ, Paul even affirms that his brothers are “full of goodness, filled with all

⁵² Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 76. See also Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 169.

⁵³ For this view, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Single Intent of Scripture,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 55–69.

⁵⁴ Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1993), 114–15.

⁵⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 330.

knowledge and able to instruct one another” (Rom 15:14). God alone is the source of goodness – and thankfully he has indeed shared his goodness with his own!⁵⁶

I conclude, then, that Paul’s use of Ps 14:1-3 and all other texts in his catena solidify an important point perhaps glossed over when Christians read these OT passages today. A common tendency when reading these “bad guy” passages is to identify immediately with the oppressed whom such passages portray alongside the wicked.⁵⁷ To a degree, this is legitimate, as all believers may regard themselves as belong to that righteous remnant that God has set apart. But it is also edifying to take to heart the depiction of iniquity that David presents in Ps 14:1-3 and elsewhere. For Paul, these passages show where all alike would go without the grace of God – indeed even where those who have the grace of God can still go if they do not cooperate with his Spirit. Apart from his regenerating work, none of us would seek him; thanks be to God that he has sought us! In this way, then, Paul’s manner of thinking underneath the situations of widespread corruption to uncover the deeper theological principle (all alike are under sin) should both give us pause and fill us with gratitude. We are all prone to wander; may we feel it!

⁵⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 108.

⁵⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1 - 50*, 148.