

Psalms 53:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Analysis

Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. This verse reports the devastating results of God's survey: universal apostasy, comprehensive corruption, total absence of goodness. The threefold emphasis—gone back, become filthy, none doing good—hammers home humanity's fallen condition apart from grace.

"Every one of them is gone back" (kullo sag, כָלֹו שָׁג) uses sug (שָׁג), meaning to turn back, backslide, apostatize. Kullo (כָלֹו) means all of them, the whole. This is comprehensive apostasy—not some departing from God but all turning away. Romans 3:12 quotes this: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable." The direction is significant: gone BACK, away from God, reverting to independence from divine authority. This describes humanity's natural trajectory after the Fall.

"They are altogether become filthy" (yachdav ne'elachu, יְחִדָּו נְאֵלָחָו) uses alach (אֵלָחָו), meaning to become corrupt, filthy, rotten. Yachdav (יְחִדָּו) means together, alike, all together. The corruption isn't isolated cases but universal condition. This is moral putrefaction—comprehensive rottenness affecting entire being. The word suggests something that has gone bad, decayed, become useless for its intended purpose. Humanity created for God's glory has become corrupted, no longer fulfilling original design.

"There is none that doeth good" (ein oseh-tov, אֵין עֹשֶׂה-טוֹב) repeats verse 1's

conclusion. Ein (אין) is absolute negation—there is NONE. Oseh-tov (עושה טוב) means doing good—not just believing good or intending good but actually accomplishing good actions. The verdict is comprehensive moral failure.

"No, not one" (ein gam-echad, אין גם אחד) adds emphatic finality. Gam (גם) means also, even. Echad (אחד) means one. Not even ONE person does good. This isn't suggesting that unregenerate people never perform actions that appear good externally, but that apart from God's grace, no human action achieves the moral perfection and God-glorifying motivation that constitutes genuine goodness. All fall short of divine standard (Romans 3:23).

Historical Context

This universal indictment seems harsh but reflects biblical realism about human fallenness. Genesis 6:5: "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 8:21: "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" These aren't isolated assessments but consistent biblical diagnosis.

Paul quotes Psalm 14/53 extensively in Romans 3:10-18 as part of his argument that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. He concludes: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This universal guilt establishes humanity's need for salvation by grace rather than works. If anyone could achieve righteousness through their own efforts, Christ's death would be unnecessary. The psalm's devastating diagnosis makes gospel grace glorious.

This doesn't mean unregenerate humans are utterly depraved in the sense of being as evil as possible—common grace restrains sin's full expression. Nor does it mean humans never perform actions that are relatively good compared to other actions. Rather, it means that apart from regeneration, human actions fall short of God's perfect standard and are tainted by sinful motivation. Isaiah 64:6: "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Even our best efforts are corrupted by pride, mixed motives, and self-interest.

The doctrine of total depravity (one of Calvinism's five points) means not that humans are maximally evil but that sin affects every aspect of human nature—mind, will, emotions, body. No part remains uncorrupted. This necessitates divine initiative in salvation: Ephesians 2:1-5 describes believers as dead in sin, made alive by God's grace. John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The psalm's diagnosis of universal corruption establishes need for divine intervention.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that humanity has 'gone back' from God, and how does this describe the natural human trajectory apart from grace?
2. How can the Bible say 'there is none that doeth good' when people obviously perform relatively good actions—what standard is being applied?
3. Why is the doctrine of total depravity (sin affecting all of human nature) crucial to understanding the necessity of salvation by grace?
4. How does recognizing your own inability to achieve righteousness apart from God protect against self-righteousness and deepen appreciation for grace?
5. In what ways does Paul's use of this psalm in Romans 3 demonstrate that Jewish and Gentile alike need salvation through Christ?

Interlinear Text

כָּל

H3605

Every one of them is gone back

H5472

שָׁבַע

וְיַחֲדֵל

they are altogether

H3162

וְיַחֲדֵל

H444

וְיַחֲדֵל

H369

become filthy

עֲשֵׂה

there is none that doeth

H6213

וְיִתְבְּרָא

good

H2896

H369

וְיִתְבְּרָא

H1571

וְיִתְבְּרָא

no not one

H259

Additional Cross-References

Romans 3:12 (Good): They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Isaiah 64:6 (Parallel theme): But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Psalms 14:3 (Good): They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Isaiah 53:6 (Parallel theme): All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org