

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY EIGHT

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

Take away the restraint and our lives are as dark and sinister as the worst of anyone who has ever lived. The only way I can be right with God is to be in His Son. And being in His Son, I am as right as He. Isn't that great?

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

W_E all have a dark side.

The selfish words that escape our mouths in a heated argument, the anger that burns in our eyes when someone gets on our last nerve, the bitterness that lingers in our hearts when we've been hurt—in all these ways and more, our dark side shows itself despite our best efforts to keep it hidden. Whether we acknowledge it or pretend it's not there, it is like a shadow that accompanies us everywhere.

From the great philanthropist to the criminal who shows no hint of remorse, the shadow is there—more visible at some times than other times, darker in some lives than in others. The root cause is depravity. It means that sin is present in everyone and has infected every fiber of our human nature, so we are wholly in need of God's cure.

We saw in our previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study that even those who were chosen by God to be His special people, the Jews, stand guilty before God. No amount of good behavior, not even being super-religious, can remedy depravity's disease. In this Bible study, we'll hear Paul's closing arguments in his case to prove humankind's desperate need for Christ and the salvation only He can give.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Chuck Swindoll
Study 8 • Page 1

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer acknowledges and expresses our need of Him. No matter how versed we are in God's Word, we always require His help. Heed David's advice to his people recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:11.

*Search for the LORD and for His strength;
continually seek Him.*

Request God's strength for this time of study. Let Him energize your passion to live for Him, kindle your devotion to learn from Him, and encourage your heart to lean on Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before we turn to [Romans 3:1–20](#), we should address the use of Old Testament passages in the New Testament. Old Testament quotes are often introduced by the phrase, “As it is written,” and denoted by quotation marks. In some translations, the font in the text changes to *italics*. Most Bibles specify the Old Testament reference. Reading these passages in their original context helps us understand the meaning and make the connection between the two testaments.

As a well-educated Pharisee, Paul had memorized vast portions of the Old Testament. In [3:10–18](#), he strung together passages from Psalms, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes illustrating how the theme of depravity weaves like a dark thread through the fabric of Scripture.



Observation: The Dark Side of Humanity

To begin, read [Romans 3:1–20](#) thoughtfully as if you're sitting in the congregation in Rome, listening to Phoebe read Paul's letter from a scroll. Note your initial observations, particularly Paul's use of questions and answers to build his case.¹

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

Observe the dialogue between Paul and his imaginary conversation partner who raises four objections. Note the first two objections in [Romans 3:1–4](#) and summarize Paul's answers.

Verse	Objections	Answers
3:1–2		
3:3–4		

What are the next two objections and answers in [3:5–8](#)?

Verse	Objections	Answers
3:5–6		
3:7–8		

According to Paul, yes, the Jews were privileged, the Jewish Law was priceless, and God would always be faithful to His people and keep His promises to them. However, they still had the same problem as everyone else. What conclusion did Paul make to his argument in [3:9](#)?

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

Paul presented the evidence in *Romans 3:10–18*. How did Paul prove that sin separates *the whole human race* from God in *3:10–12*? Note the repeated words and phrases.

Note the illustrations that Paul used to demonstrate how sin permeates *the whole person* in *3:13–18*. Restate each of them in shorter phrases.

Now, look closer at *3:19–20*. What are the purposes of the Law?

Foul talk, lying tongues, venomous lips, feet swift to murder . . . and the Law cannot help us become better! Are all people really under sin's power? Let's dig deeper.



Interpretation: We All Have a Dark Side!

In *Romans 3:1–4*, we observed that God remains faithful to the promises He made to the Jews despite Israel's unbelief. The phrase, "As the Scriptures say," in 3:4 introduced Paul's quotation of *Psalms 51:4*. The superscription before *Psalms 51* records that David wrote this psalm after committing "adultery with Bathsheba." Based on the context of David's sin, explain the significance of what Paul was saying about God's character and Israel's sinfulness.

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

Here is a Jewish king who has done what is wrong. However, David steps back and says, “My sin has nothing to do with God’s character.” Even though the Jew may live in unbelief, God is still going to keep His Word.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

To those who twist Paul’s grace-oriented teaching to say they can sin all they want so God can show more grace, Paul replied in [Romans 3:5–8](#) that these people are justly condemned. Sin injures the soul and insults God. Look up the Greek word [endikos](#), translated “just” in a Greek lexicon available for free at [billmounce.com](#). How would you explain these verses to a friend?

It’s Paul’s way of simply saying in a few words, “Ah, what I’ve said about the lost is truer than ever.” Anyone who thinks like that reveals how dark his or her dark side is. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Paul explained and illustrated human depravity in [3:10–18](#). In [3:12](#), he used the word *corrupt* (NASB). Consult a [commentary](#) on this verse or look up the Greek word [achreioo](#), translated “corrupt” in the Greek lexicon mentioned above. In your own words, explain this word and its significance to modern-day readers.

Depravity doesn’t mean you’re as bad as you can be. Depravity means we are as bad off as we could possibly be without help from above.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

We observed that the Law exposes our sinfulness in [3:19–20](#). Explore the term [law](#) in a Bible dictionary. You have free access to the [Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) at [biblestudytools.com](#). In that one, look at the section “[The Law Prepares Sinners for the Gospel](#).” How does the Law prepare sinners for the good news?

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

The Law was given to reveal the sinfulness of sin. And if you wonder if you are really a sinner, read the Law. Start with the Ten Commandments. Find one that you haven't broken. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Law reveals our depravity, which has been part of human nature since the first act of disobedience. Let's survey the Holy Scriptures to find out when the poisonous seed was first planted.



Correlation: Darkness in Adam

The step of correlation gives us clear discernment about our spiritual condition. Beginning with Adam and Eve, the Scriptures expose our dark side, as well as our desperate need for the Savior.

Compare [Romans 5:12](#) to [Genesis 3](#). How did sin enter the world?

Had Adam not sinned, Adam would never have died. Adam and Eve would have lived on forever with their Creator God. However, upon sinning, the root of depravity drove deeply into the human race, and it yielded the fruit of sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Take some time to compare [Genesis 2:16–17](#) to [Romans 5:12](#) and [Ephesians 2:1–3](#). What immediately resulted from Adam's sin?

Adam and Eve at the moment of sinning immediately died spiritually. Death is the concept of separation. They were separated from their Creator. Their hearts that once loved God no longer loved God. Their minds that knew God no longer knew God. Their wills that once obeyed God no longer wish to obey God. They were depraved as a result of the sin. And as a result of the sin, death happened. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

Compare *Romans 3:10–20; 5:17; Ephesians 2:1–10; and Colossians 1:13–14*. How does human depravity help us understand our need for God’s amazing grace? How can someone get transferred from darkness to light?

Isn’t that good news? Isn’t it great that He doesn’t leave us in our blood-guiltiness? Isn’t it great that He doesn’t say, “Shame on you!” and walk away from us for eternity? No, He doesn’t do that. He comes to our rescue.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How deep is the love of Christ that rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into His kingdom of light.



Application: Share the Rescue!

Depravity reveals our desperate need for Christ. What are some truths the Holy Spirit has revealed to you in this Bible study that you would like to share with a friend? You can write them down here as a short poem or letter.

*Jesus Christ came to our wall.
Jesus Christ died for our fall.
He slew Queen Death; He crushed King Sin.
Through grace, He put us together again.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Think of the words you would use if someone were to ask you to lead him or her into a relationship with God.

An Autopsy of Depravity

Romans 3:1–20

You could pray something like, “Lord, I acknowledge I am in a dark place and lost and sinful. And that means You and I have no relationship, but I believe Jesus paid it all for me. So I take Your gift, and hand in hand with Him, by faith, I come to You, heavenly Father. Thank You for saving my life.”

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Take time to thank God for His assistance in this Bible study. Tell Him of the joy and peace you’ve experienced since you’ve been rescued by His grace. Express in prayer your heartfelt gratitude toward your heavenly Father.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2006, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

insight.org

Insight for Living
Study 8 • Page 8