

Extending and Repaving the Romans Road

Millions of believers have been taught "the Romans Road" as an approach to evangelism. Often, those who present this approach teach the use of five verses: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10; and 10:13.

Undoubtedly, God has used this approach to save many people. Nonetheless, **key considerations call for extending and repaving the Romans Road.**

First, the "success" of this approach has resulted from realities that need careful scrutiny. In those cases when the approach has been successful in bringing people to salvation, has it ever been *just* the information supplied by these verses *alone* that did so? It is highly questionable that these verses alone have ever brought to salvation people who had no prior Scriptural exposure or understanding. Rather, those people who were saved through this approach were saved because they already understood some other truths that they had received from various other sources prior to that evangelistic encounter in which they were finally saved. Since this interplay between prior knowledge and the witness given through these verses was responsible for their salvation, we do well not to insist that these verses *alone* are all we need to give to sinners to evangelize them. At the very least, Scripture itself does not directly support such insistence.

Second, what do we learn by considering more closely the source from which these particular verses were chosen as an approach for providing sufficient information for an evangelistic witness? In the book of Romans, 83 verses precede Romans 3:23. Is it true that the truths communicated in those verses are sufficiently accounted for by using these five verses? To answer that question, some points about the preceding verses deserve consideration.

In Romans 1:1-3:22, there are at least nineteen verses that considered together express emphatically that God is the righteous Judge (1:18, 24, 26, 28, 32; 2:2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 16; 3:4, 5, 6, 7, 19, 20). Moreover, Romans 2:16 adds the key truth of "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to [Paul's] gospel." In the typical use of the Romans Road verses, are these truth clearly communicated to sinners? If not, are we justified in continuing to use this approach? **Should we not rather allow the divine structure of Romans to lead us to extend and repave the Romans Road by adding at least Romans 2:16** (or other statements that communicate all the same truths)?

Adding just that one statement puts us much more directly in line with the flow of thought that God Himself inspired in the book of Romans as a whole. This extension has other beneficial effects as well. None of us has the ability to know all the sins of the people to whom we witness. Often, we do not have any specific information about the people to whom we witness. By informing their minds of the specific truth that God is going to one day judge their secrets, *we use God's own words to plant truth in their minds that the Spirit can use to convict every sinner*. This is true because every sinner has secrets known only to him and God. By informing a sinner that God is going to judge his secrets, we allow God's own words to pierce through to his innermost being and expose the thoughts and intents of his heart (Heb. 4:12).

Third, adding Romans 2:16 (or some equivalent statement) brings our evangelism more in line with explicit revelation concerning what Jesus commanded His apostles to proclaim to the world: "He commanded us to preach and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead" (Acts 10:42). This verse stresses the proclamation of Christ as God's judicial agent, and in the divine structure of Romans, Romans 2:16 serves to communicate that essential truth. Adding Romans 2:16 is also supported in this respect because doing so aligns contemporary evangelism with the same truth found at the climax of the only lengthy account provided in Scripture of Pauline evangelism of Gentiles (Acts 17:16-34).

Fourth, using Romans 2:16 before Romans 3:23 accomplishes another key function. It does so by providing a better context from which to explain Romans 3:23. Presenting Romans 3:23 often takes the form of simply telling the sinner that they have sinned (with the use sometimes of an accompanying illustration explaining how they have "missed the mark"). Such handling of Romans 3:23 only partially

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accounts for the truth in that statement because typically comparatively less attention is then given to the final words, "come short of the glory of God." By doing so, we miss the opportunity to use very useful information, as the following discussion explains.

Paul concludes Romans 3:23 by saying that all have "come short of the **glory of God**" (ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ). Daniel 5 is a closely parallel passage in the Septuagint that provides key insight into Paul's ending words. Daniel indicts King Belshazzar for his sinfulness by saying,

But [thou] has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and **the God** [τὸν Θεόν] in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose are all thy ways, **hast thou not glorified** [ἐδόξασας](5:23).

Daniel's statement that Belshazzar did not glorify God directly parallels Paul's in Romans 3:23 by using the cognate verb (δοξάζω) of the word Paul used for glory (δόξα).

A few verses later, another of Daniel's statements also parallels Paul's statement in Romans 3:23 by using the same verb (ὑστερέω) that Paul used (Θεκέλ, ἐστάθη ἐν ζυγῶ, καὶ εὑρέθη ὑστεροῦσα; "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting"; Dan. 5:27). Bringing the truths expressed by the combination of Daniel 5:23 and 5:27 to bear on our understanding of Romans 3:23 yields the rich insight that **what Paul had in view by "come short of the glory of God" is that God as the Judge has weighed all of us in the balances and found us wanting** – it is in that sense that we have come short of the glory of God. Both Paul and Daniel thus in essentially the same way indict sinners for their having come short of the glory of God.

Many people have the idea that they will be ok because they think that they are good people and that they have done more good than bad. Explaining the full statement in Romans 3:23 using the familiar and biblical concept of weighing in a balance will provide them with truth that shows them that their estimation of themselves is wrong. They may think that they are good, but God says to them that He has weighed them in his balances (cf. 1 Sam. 2:3; Job 31:6; Prov. 16:2), and they have come short of His righteousness by having no righteousness of their own to counterbalance His glory, the weightiness of His perfect righteousness (cf. Ps. 97:6, where God's righteousness is paralleled with His glory). *In the way that matters most, every unsaved person is hopelessly underweight* (cf. Ps. 62:9).

By our first using Romans 2:16 to extend the Romans Road, we provide an explicit divine statement that informs sinners about God as the Judge who will judge their secrets one day through Jesus. By then repaving the Romans Road through expanding our explanation of Romans 3:23 to include the insight from Daniel 5, we challenge sinners by informing them that God the Judge has already weighed them in His balances and found them wanting. Doing so, we are able to facilitate conviction of sin coming to sinners even without our knowing any specific sins that they have committed.

Based on the divine structure of Romans and on the other key considerations discussed above, **we should use at least Romans 2:16 (or some equivalent statement) before using 3:23, and then we should more thoroughly explain Romans 3:23 before going into the rest of the Romans Road.** Extending and repaving the Romans Road in this way will enhance our evangelism *greatly*.

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