

# Romans Part 6 – Chapters 1 and 2

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With input from gotquestions.org, theogeek blogspot, Kenneth Berding -Talbot School of Theology

Arguments challenging the true meaning of Romans 1:

## 1. Paul is making an argument of past immorality of gentiles as compared to Jewish morality of the day:

This is first noted by the past tense of the argument in Romans

### Romans 1:16-31

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

*<sup>21</sup> For although **they knew God, they did not** honor him as God or give thanks to him, but **they became** futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, **they became** fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

*<sup>24</sup> Therefore God **gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because **they exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

*<sup>26</sup> For this reason God **gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women **exchanged** natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

*<sup>28</sup> And since **they did not see fit** to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> **They were** filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.*

**Now moves to present tense:** *They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> Though **they know** God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only **do them** but **give approval** to those who practice them.*

Does it truly make a difference if Paul is quoting someone else?

Kenneth Bearding, Talbot School of Theology states: One of Paul's teaching strategies in his letter to the Romans is to use questions (85) to move along his argument and to help his readers think hard about what he's writing. Paul's questions will underscore that Paul was speaking into a historical situation. Notice that the self-identification of Jewish and Gentile Christians vis-à-vis one another and in relation to the non-Christian Jewish community plays an important role in this list of questions. As

you keep the historical setting in mind, you'll become a much better reader of Paul's letter to the Romans.

3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

3:29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?

3:31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also?

7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

**It is then argued by Textual Criticism:** How does textual criticism approach the Bible?

Textual criticism examines biblical manuscripts and their content to identify what the original text probably said. Source criticism searches the text for evidence of their original sources. Form criticism identifies short units of text seeking the setting of their origination.

## Biblical Punctuation Primer

The casual reader of Scripture needs to know that **Scripture originally had no punctuation**. The Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, as written, contain no punctuation—or very little punctuation in some sections of the Greek New Testament. The above is a picture of the Gospel of John—where do the sentences end and begin? Translators have to take into account the structure of the sentence and the argument to determine where punctuation goes.

**Punctuation matters** because where one places a comma or a period affects the reading of the text. Dr. Benjamin Shaw reflects:

*For example, Ephesians 1:3-14 (one extended sentence in Greek) is divided into three sentences by the KJV, and up to fourteen or so sentences by some of the modern simple language translations. But this punctuation is a matter of editorial choice.*

*So for example, in Ephesians 1:4, the KJV reads, "that we should be holy and without blame **before him in love:**" The ESV reads, "that we should be holy and blameless **before him. In love**" (with the sentence then continuing into verse 5). The difference between the two renderings is that in the KJV, the phrase "in love" is understood to go with what precedes, as is indicated by the punctuation. In the ESV, the phrase "in love" is understood to go with what follows, again as indicated by the punctuation.*

As biblical transcription and comparison efforts are more holistic, as we cross-reference how an author uses words or phrases in other sections of texts—as well as how the corpus of literature at the time used the phrases—our understanding of biblical texts becomes *better* over time and we can get closer to the intended wording of the text.

And in at least one case, proper punctuation severely diminishes the argument that Romans 1 is anti-gay.

### Romans 1: Secretly Plagiarized?

Romans 1:26-27 is often quoted to support arguments that the Bible renders same-gender relationships to be anathema to God. However, many scholars are persuaded that Romans 1 is another passage that contains *both* Paul's writings and an extended quotation of a theological opponent or strawman *who is then refuted* in Romans 2. Theo Geek writes:

*Romans 1:18-32 seems to be an instance of an ancient literary device called “speech-in-character” (prosopopoeia). Or, more simply put, is what we would call a “dialog” or “debate”, with Paul deliberately presenting an opposition viewpoint and responding. It is now well-established that in Romans 7 Paul uses a lengthy speech-in-character without warning his readers. Equally, in many part of Romans that take a question and answer format, Paul is obviously engaging in a pseudo-dialog with opposing viewpoints.*

Dr. James McGrath uses technology in some of his biblical critiques and writes:

*As Paul piles on the insults aimed at the character of Gentiles, in a manner typical of Jewish polemic in Romans 1:29-31, BibleWorks was able to tell me something that other sources did not: just how many words are not merely rare, but **the only instances of Paul using the word** among the entirety of the authentic epistles...*

*Why is Paul's language so different here? One plausible explanation is because he is mimicking the speech of one or more others. Indeed, it is not impossible to envisage him actually **drawing on some other person's well-known tirade against Gentiles** in order to make his depiction of that position particularly relevant and poignant, quite possibly specifically that in *Wisdom of Solomon 12-14*.*

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The Wisdom of Solomon was believed by some to have been written by King Solomon, although his name appears nowhere in the text. However, the early church rejected the authorship of Solomon; an ancient manuscript known as the Muratorian fragment refers to the Wisdom of Solomon as having been written by “the friends of Solomon in his honor.” It is widely accepted today, even by the Catholic Church, that Solomon did not write the book, which dates back to the 1st or 2nd century BC, many centuries after the death of Solomon.

While Solomon wrote much on the subject of wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, he never elevated it to the status of part of the Godhead, a philosophy found in The Wisdom of Solomon. The book refers to Wisdom in terms the Bible reserves for the Messiah, saying, “She [wisdom] is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wisdom 7:26). The book of Hebrews reserves such accolades for the Son of God, who “is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). Even more egregious, Wisdom 9:18 says that salvation is an act of wisdom, whereas Scripture is clear that

salvation is by faith, a gift of God to those whom He calls, justifies, and sanctifies (Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 8:30). In fact, if man were to depend upon his “wisdom” for salvation, we would be lost forever with no hope because the unredeemed are dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1–4) and their minds are darkened (Ephesians 4:18; 1 Corinthians 2:14) and their heart deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

The apocryphal books are accepted by the Roman Catholic Church because many of the books teach Catholic doctrines that are not in agreement with the Bible, including praying for the dead, petitioning Mary to intercede with the Father, worshiping angels, and alms-giving as atonement for sins. Some of what the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonicals say is true and correct. However, due to the historical and theological errors, the books, including The Wisdom of Solomon, must be viewed as fallible historical and religious documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

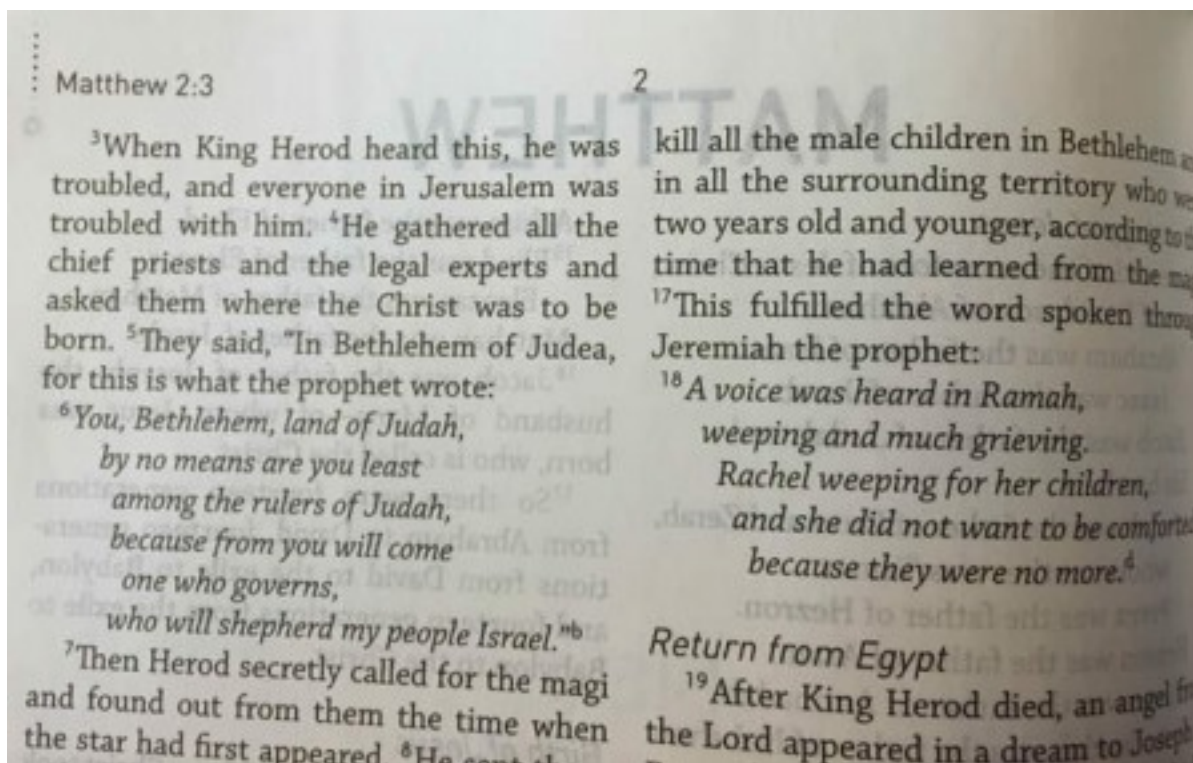
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*And so, the rhetorical turn indicated by the vocative at the start of chapter 2, the move to condemn the speaker voicing the point of view articulated in chapter 1, and the distinctive vocabulary do all seem to reinforce this point: **The views articulated in Romans 1:18-32 cannot be treated as Paul’s.***

*This doesn’t mean that Paul disagreed with all the points, any more than it can be assumed that a Christian and an atheist, or two people of different political parties, will disagree on everything, even when they quote one another polemically or satirically. **But it does mean that one ought not to use Romans 1:18-32 to determine Paul’s own views.***

The problem of traditional translations means that **we’ve turned Paul’s argument from a polemic into plagiarism.** And that’s being unfaithful to the text.

By assigning the opinions about gay people to Paul’s lips instead of his opponent, we’ve weakened the argument he’s trying to make and **stunted the biblical witness against rushing-to-judgment that Romans 2 makes.**



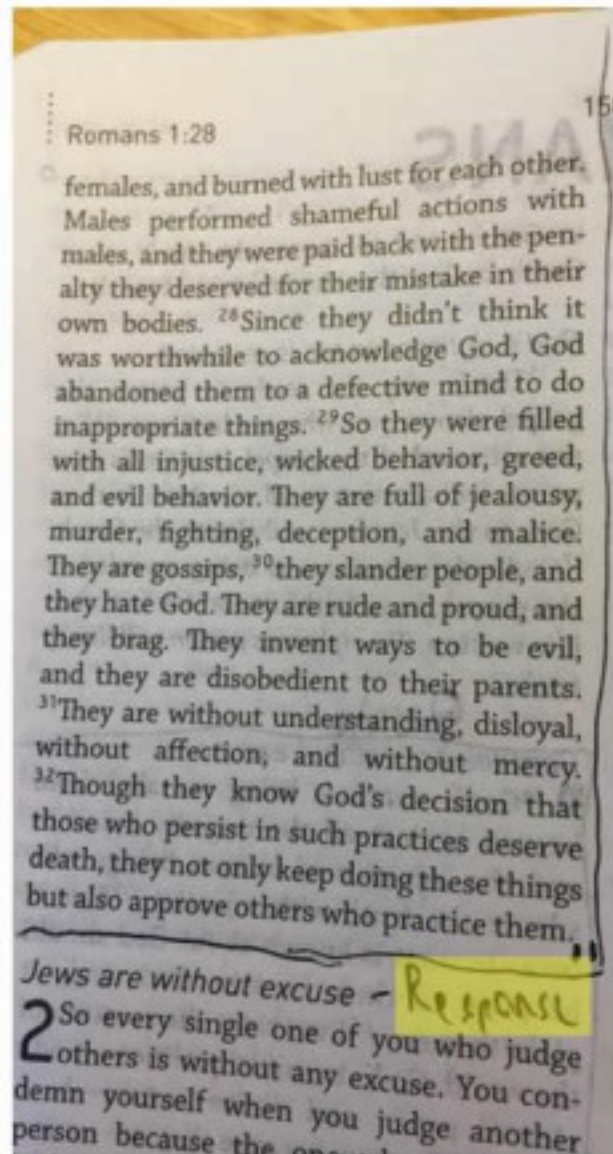
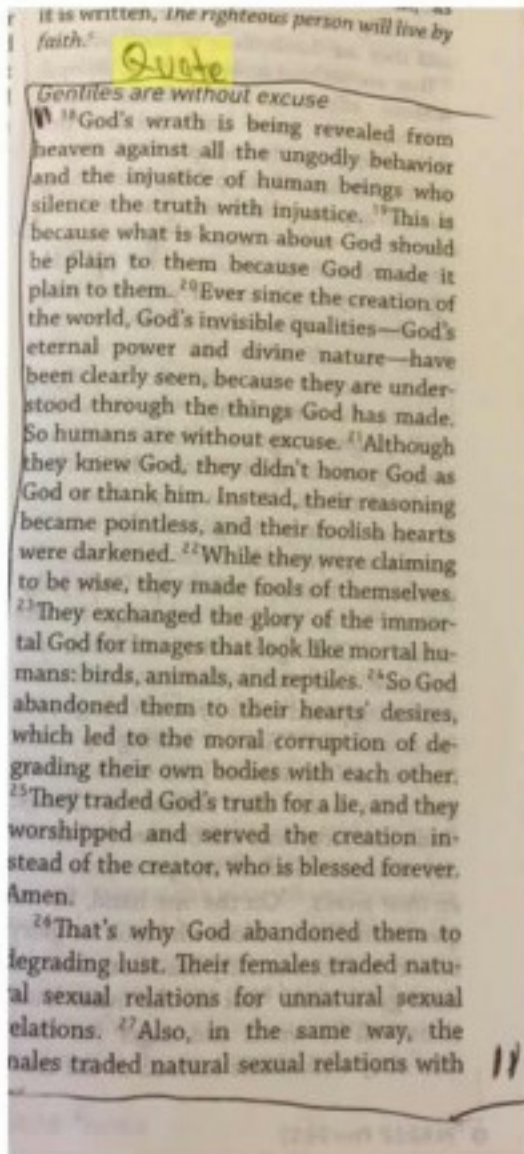
## The Need for Proper Punctuation

So how can the scholar inform the casual reader of Scripture that the above is a quote, not Paul's words?

McGrath recently highlighted the work of Dan Wilkinson to depict that the offending section of Romans 1 needs to be in blockquotes:

*If it's true that Romans 1:18-32 isn't in fact Paul's voice, shouldn't our English text clearly reflect that? **Why not add quotation marks around that passage to set it off from the rest of Paul's letter?** And, while we're at it, why not add section headers that clarify the rhetorical interplay that's taking place?*

We do this already, especially when the Gospels are quoting prophetic literature. Read a hardbound copy of Matthew and you'll see the references to Hebrew Bible prophecy are in italics or quoted differently in some way. The above picture is how it looks in my Common English Bible. The translators of Matthew are *very clear* to note that the prophetic writings are different sources than the Gospel—**why can we not do the same with the Pauline scriptures?**



“What’s needed in Scripture is *precisely* this kind of **form criticism**: clearly articulating *who* is speaking in each Scripture verse and how the reader is to hold or frame the passage in Scripture. By better visualizing that framework in Romans, we are better able to frame the anti-gay verse as not coming from Paul’s mouth but from that of his opponent—we have no other indicators that he agrees with the quote—and that is of tremendous help to LGBT Christians.”

## **Romans 2:1-11**

*Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. <sup>2</sup> We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup> Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

*<sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.*

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