

Romans Part 5 – Chapter 1

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With input from gotquestions.org, Dr. Jeff Iorg, Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary, Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, theogeek blogspot

Romans 1:16-31

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” We see this in Hebrews 11 – The Heros of the Faith Chapter

“*From faith to faith* is an expression found in some versions of Romans 1:17, such as the King James Version, and the New American Standard Bible. The English Standard Version uses the wording “from faith for faith” instead. The meaning of the phrase becomes more evident in the New International Version: “by faith from first to last.”

Nothing mattered more to Paul than fulfilling God’s will for his life, which was to preach the good news of salvation. Without the good news of the gospel, and without the power that is the gospel, there can be no salvation, no freedom from sin, no redemption, and no life. The power of the gospel is the theme of Paul’s letter to the Romans and the ambition of his life.

Paul tells the Roman Christians that “in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed” (Romans 1:17). Righteousness is thus a complete and total work of God. Humans tend to view righteousness as something we can achieve by our own merit or actions. But the righteousness of God is different. It is a right standing before God that has nothing to do with human accomplishment or worth. It is received by faith. There is nothing we can do to deserve or earn it.

The exact meaning of Paul’s phrase *from faith to faith* has been debated, with several plausible explanations proposed. Some understand it in relation to the origin of faith: “From the faith of God, who makes the offer of salvation, to the faith of men, who receive it.” In simpler terms, “Salvation comes from God’s faith (or faithfulness) to our faith - salvation is accomplished through God’s faithfulness, which comes first, and our faith in response to that.

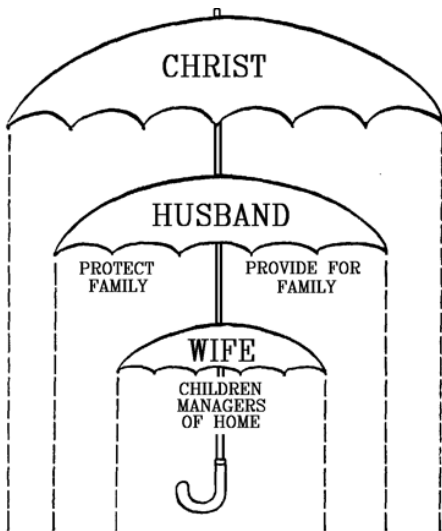
Others believe that Paul had the spreading of faith through evangelism in mind: “From the faith of one believer to another.” A third and widely accepted understanding is that *from faith to faith* speaks of a progressive, growing development of faith “from one degree of faith to another” akin to the “ever-increasing glory” of **2 Corinthians 3:18**: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Another view is that Paul meant that from day one of our journey of faith until the very last day, we (the righteous) must live by faith. Whether we are brand-new followers of Christ or seasoned, mature believers who have walked with the Lord for many years, we must trust God “from start to finish” and rely on His mighty power—the power of the gospel—to change our lives and the lives of those we encounter.

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

1. There is a moral law that God has put in place just as there are laws of gravity, laws of thermodynamics, laws of motion, etc...
 - A. It does not require God to dole out judgment or punishments.
 - B. We need to stay under God's authority structure to remain protected from Satan's threats



2. The unrighteous suppress the truth – This is important to remember when discussing Jesus with unbelievers.

¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *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.*

²¹ *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him,*

2 Timothy 3:1-5: *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; avoid such people as these.*

but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ 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.

Perhaps one of the saddest statements in scripture “God gave them up”

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ 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.

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. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² 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.

The last statement of approval represents the last step in a line of evils actions:

Dr. Jeff Iorg, Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary – “Immorality, When Celebrated, Is Ominous”

The U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings on gay marriage in June summon a response to “the most significant change in American society since abortion on demand was legalized in 1973,” Jeff Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, said during the seminary’s fall convocation.

Iorg warned that legalizing gay marriage is “an alarming affirmation of the final step of rejecting God’s design for human sexuality and traditional marriage as the foundation of a stable society.”

The apostle Paul’s description of first-century Rome in Romans 1:32 is sobering and applicable to the current situation, Iorg said.

“Sexual sins are not the final step on this downward spiral,” Iorg said. “The last step of rejecting biblical morality is when people applaud or celebrate those who legitimize immoral practices. We have reached that point in America.”

Such a hearty approval is why the Supreme Court decisions and cultural celebrations of gay marriage are so troubling, Iorg said.

“Sexual immorality — of all types — has been part of the human experience throughout recorded history,” he said. “The troubling issue today isn’t so much the rise of immorality. That cycle ebbs and flows with changing generations. The troubling issue is the applause, from kissing in the streets to White House ceremonies celebrated through every media possible.”

Political, cultural and educational leaders are effusively congratulating themselves on their so-called progress, Iorg said.

“The final act of an unraveling society isn’t immoral behavior; it’s canonizing immoral behavior as a ‘new normal’ and celebrating it as a ‘moral victory.’”

This cultural shift “will produce many new ministry dilemmas, Iorg said, noting that Christians must continue to affirm distinct moral standards. Recounting the apostle Paul’s list of unbelievers’ behavior, he said Paul contrasts how believers formerly lived and how they are expected to live now.

“The clear implication is believers once behaved like unbelievers, and the time for such behavior is now past.” Christians must also restrain immoral impulses not because it’s easy, Iorg said, “but because we are trying to live up to a biblical moral standard.”

“As a Christian leader or leader in training, you are expected to model even higher standards,” Iorg said. “While this seems obvious to many of us, it’s getting harder to maintain distinctive Christian morality.”

Iorg cited 1 Peter 4:1-11 as a passage that makes clear Christian moral standards will be aggressively opposed by unbelievers.

“As a result of your unwillingness to affirm their choices, unbelievers will slander you,” Iorg told the seminary community during the Aug. 29 convocation. “I predict that today’s slander is a precursor to more serious social, legal and physical opposition coming in the next few years.”

Opposition to moral standards requires a Christian response, he said.

“We know that unbelievers who reject biblical morality are at risk of judgment, and this motivates us to tell people about deliverance available through Jesus Christ,” Iorg said. “Your most significant message to people in a culture marked by moral decay and immoral living is the Gospel.”

Believers cannot become preoccupied with opposing immoral behavior, Iorg said; instead, they must realize that moral choices come from a person’s spiritual condition.

“Unbelievers act like unbelievers. While we uphold our moral convictions, expecting unbelievers to model Christian behavior is a misplaced hope. Your first and best response to immorality in your community is to preach, teach, share, witness and live the Gospel,” Iorg said.

“The greatest need of every person in the world — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, adulterer, fornicator or straight-laced puritan is still the Gospel.”

Sharing the Gospel with the LGBT community means welcoming them into worship services and befriending them at work and in social settings, Iorg said.

“While holding to your moral convictions, you must keep your focus on the greatest need of every person — no matter their behavior — which is responding to the Gospel,” Iorg said.

Above all, he advised based on Peter’s words, maintain an intense love for them.

“When attacked, we need each other to withstand the pressure and become more unified with other believers,” Iorg said. “Yet there is also ample biblical mandate to love unbelievers. Tell the truth about immoral behavior, while treating people with respect.”

Iorg closed by affirming the distinct moral standards set forth in God’s Word.

“We expect opposition to those standards and will respond appropriately by communicating the Gospel to all people by every available means. We will love each other, standing stronger when we stand together. We will love unbelievers, loving them enough to tell them the truth about God and the Gospel,” Iorg said. “These foundations will serve us well as we fulfill our mission of shaping leaders who expand God’s Kingdom around the world.”

We should know what arguments are out there so that we can discuss a clear biblical understanding of Romans:

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

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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.

*²¹ 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. ²² Claiming to be wise, **they became** fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

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*²⁶ For this reason God **gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women **exchanged** natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ 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.*

*²⁸ 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. ²⁹ **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, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² 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.*

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...*

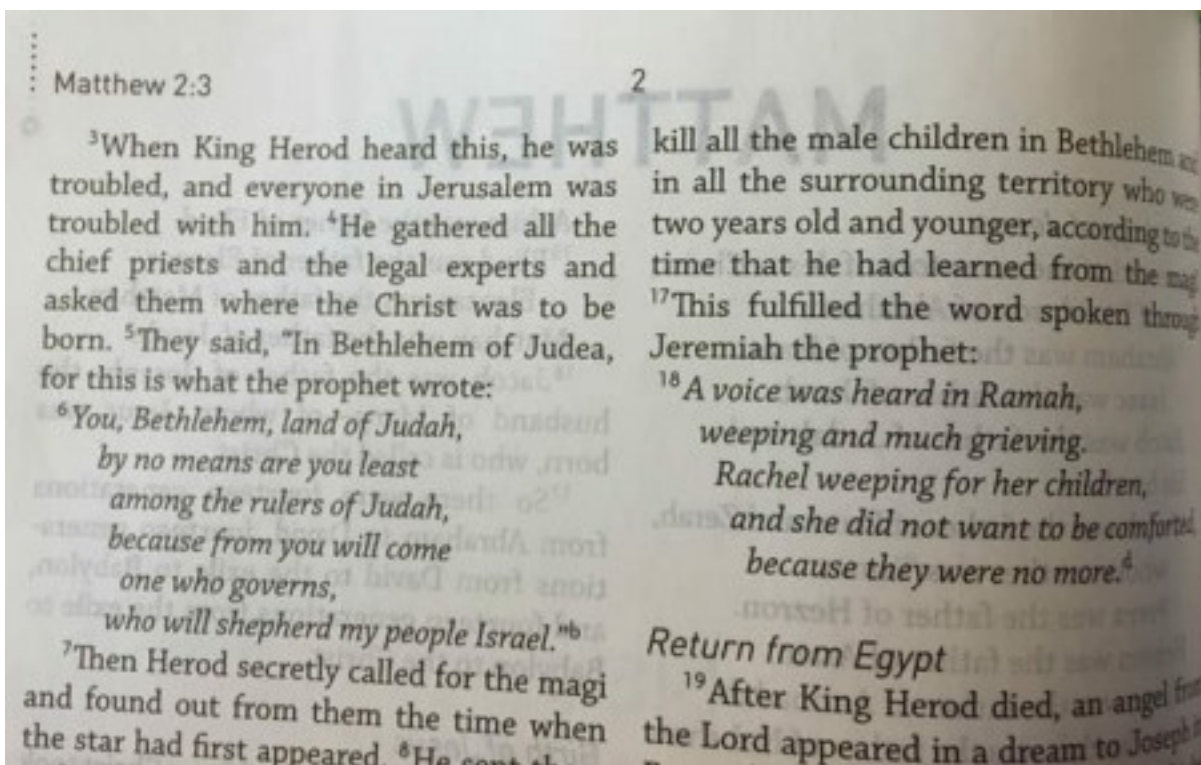
Why is Paul's language so different here? One plausible explanation is because he is mimicking the speech of one or more others. Indeed, it is not impossible to envisage him actually drawing on some other person's well-known tirade against Gentiles in order to make his depiction of that position particularly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

*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.**



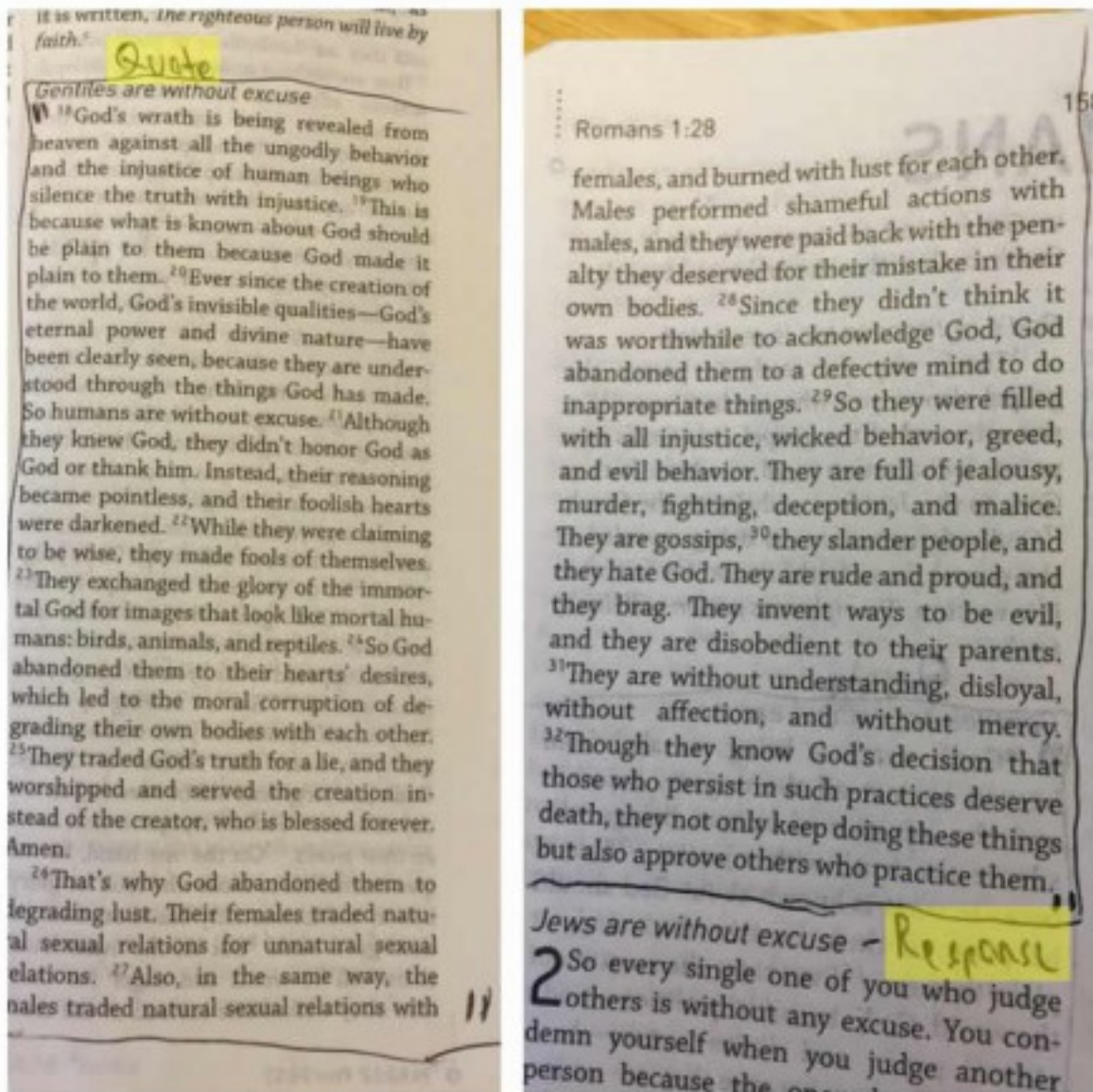
The Need for Proper Punctuation

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.”