

**ROMANS 1.18-32 AND HOMOSEXUALITY DISCOURSE IN UGANDA AND  
BEYOND**

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## DECLARATION

As the author of this dissertation, I, Silvanus Bob Turyamwijuka, thus declare that all help I obtained in its preparation is completely acknowledged and stated in the report. Additionally, I attest that I wrote this work in order to partially fulfill the requirements for the Master of Divinity degree at Uganda Christian University in Mukono.

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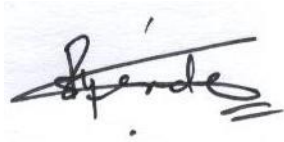
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## APPROVAL

This dissertation has been approved by the undersigned person as the requirement for the award of Master of Divinity. As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Signature

Date: 21<sup>st</sup> August 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nyende', with a horizontal line above it and a double underline below it.

REV. CAN. CAPT PROF PETER NYENDE

(Supervisor)

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, who helped, encouraged, and guided me during my academic journey to the university level. I also dedicate this research to my dear wife, who has always supported me and encouraged me to complete my research dissertation. Above all, I am grateful to the Almighty God for providing the direction and resources I needed to finish this dissertation.

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## ABSTRACT

The study aims at exploring Romans 1:18-32 and homosexuality discourse in Uganda and beyond. The study was guided by objectives which are; to give the historical background of Romans, to conduct a literary analysis of Romans, a detailed exegesis of Romans 1:18-32, and to consider the usefulness of the historical reading of Romans 1:18-32 in various current issues of homosexuality.

This study employed the historical and literary context method of interpretation to Romans 1:18-32, an admission that Scripture is to be understood by examining its initial context, audience, culture, and situation, as well as argument flow and genre. Historical context establishes the author, audience, and traditions, while literary context examines form and structure to discover meaning. As Duvall & Hays (2012) and Fee & Stuart (2003) note, proper interpretation is God's intended sense by the text. It is this sense that uncovers the on-going relevance of Romans 1:18-32 to Uganda today.

The study revealed that the Anglican Church of Uganda can address homosexuality, as found in Romans 1:18-32, by grounding its stance firmly in biblical teaching, intensifying pastoral counselling and discipleship, and promoting marriage and family education as the model for sexual ethics. The Church needs to use Scripture responsibly in the public square, invest in youth ministry for moral formation, and build community support systems that uphold accountability and godly living. Training clergy and lay leaders in a proper theology of sexuality, advancing cultural renewal through moral education, and offering compassionate pastoral care for individuals who struggle with same-sex attraction are required. In conclusion, collaboration with regional and global Anglican bodies such as GAFCON ensures theological integrity, pastoral sensitivity, and a unified response to contemporary sexual ethics in the Ugandan situation, which is unique.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the exegesis

The Romans 1:18-32 text has traditionally been a point of reference in Christian theology when sin, idolatry, and human sexuality have been debated<sup>1</sup>. The argument Paul builds here is centered on the consequences of human denial of divine revelation and ties it to a moral and social breakdown. Scholars have noted that this pericope does not reflect merely theological concerns but Greco-Roman world cultural as well as religious tensions<sup>2</sup>. Particularly, its mention of homosexual acts has become central in contemporary homosexuality debates within and outside the church. The Ugandan context, which is manifested through legal and socio-religious homosexuality opposition, necessitates cautious exegetical interpretation of the passage<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, this research thus seeks to interpret Romans 1:18-32 theologically and contextually but also highlight its relevance to current homosexuality concerns in Uganda. This chapter will include a problem statement/issue, research thesis, and literature review and research methodology.

Romans 1:18-32 is an offensive scriptural passage often used in theological, moral, and socio-political debates about human sexuality, particularly homosexuality<sup>4</sup>. As a classical scriptural reading, the passage is read as a condemnation of human wickedness and idolatry and thus of homosexual relationships as evidence of the human revolt against God<sup>5</sup>. The rhetorical structure of Paul's argument in this section sets the stage for his overall argument about human sinfulness and the necessity of divine grace<sup>6</sup>. Theological importance of the passage is tied up with an examination of the phrase "the wrath of God" (Rom 1:18), which Paul uses to make his case concerning the fallen state of man<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, N. T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One: Chapters 1-8*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>2</sup> Swancutt, D. (2020). *Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1: 18-2: 16. A feminist companion to Paul*.

<sup>3</sup> Kruse, C. G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, S. K. (1980). The "Righteousness of God" in Romans. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 99(2), 241-290.

<sup>5</sup> Moo, D. J. (1996). *The epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, J. R. (2011). *Romans (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series)*. Baker Books.

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, J. D. (1988). *Romans 9-16 (Vol. 2)*. Dallas: Word Books.

This wrath of God is not a form of punishment but a demonstration of God's righteous opposition to evil and moral decay in human society<sup>8</sup>.

From a biblical-theological point of view, Paul's condemnation of same-sex relationships in Romans 1 must be placed within the larger context of creation and covenant in the Hebrew Bible<sup>9</sup>. Paul utilizes Jewish moral tradition and Hellenistic concepts of natural law to explain his denunciation of Gentile practice<sup>10</sup>. Greco-Roman culture during the time of Paul permitted, and indeed idealized, various forms of same-sex relationships, especially among upper-class men, so that Paul's assertions become culturally counter-intuitive and polemical<sup>11</sup>. Paul's appeal in Romans 1:18-32 can be then seen as grounded not merely upon cultural disapproval but theological persuasion regarding divine order<sup>12</sup>. This theological foundation is crucial in understanding how this passage is utilized today in discussions surrounding sexuality<sup>13</sup>.

Romans 1 interpretations have varied across church traditions and centuries, echoing changing morality, gender role, and cultural ideas<sup>14</sup>. In early church societies, Romans 1 was employed to differentiate the new church from pagan as well as Jewish contexts<sup>15</sup>. During the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, this book was re-appropriated to establish moral reformation and biblical authority<sup>16</sup>. New hermeneutical examinations in recent decades have questioned the feasibility of Paul's writing to

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<sup>8</sup> Kruse, C. G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

<sup>9</sup> Loader, W. R. (2010). *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the key texts*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, J. D. (1990). *Jesus, Paul, and the law: studies in Mark and Galatians*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>11</sup> Ellis, J. E. (2007). *Paul and ancient views of sexual desire: Paul's sexual ethics in 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 7 and Romans 1* (Vol. 354). Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>12</sup> Barret, C. K. (1971). *The Epistles to The Romans* (ed. Henry Chadwick; *Black's New Testament Commentaries*; London: Adam & Clark Black, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Spitaler, P. (2011). An integrative, synergistic reading of Romans 1-3. *Biblical interpretation*, 19(1), 33-71.

<sup>14</sup> Bell, R. H. (1998). *No one seeks for God: an exegetical and theological study of Romans 1.18-3.20* (Vol. 106). Mohr Siebeck.

<sup>15</sup> Keener, C. S. (2011). *Romans: a new covenant commentary*.

<sup>16</sup> Baker-Brian, N. (2017). *Summaries, Divisions and Rubrics of the Latin Bible: Studia Traditionis Theologiae*.

homophobic consensual same-sex relationships as presently understood<sup>17</sup>. This shift invites consideration of the original purpose of the passage against current uses<sup>18</sup>.

Romans 1 must be read within the broader Pauline framework of sin, grace, and universal human fallenness. Paul's rhetorical technique uses a "diatribe" genre, anticipating criticism and taking the reader towards the conclusion that all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, is under the need of redemption<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, Paul's condemnation of homosexual activities is not compartmentalized moralism but part of a broader theological discussion regarding human brokenness and God's righteousness<sup>20</sup>. It is not compartmentalized ethical list but a deeply structured argument for theology concerning perversion of created purpose by humanity being central<sup>21</sup>. This broad-based structure can serve to guard against isolated readings neglecting the context of Paul's broader sense<sup>22</sup>.

Homosexuality is a contentious and sensitive issue in Uganda, where religious teaching, law, and social attitudes firmly against gay relationships<sup>23</sup>. The Ugandan churches appeal to Romans 1 as a theological basis for denouncing homosexuals<sup>24</sup>. But this has also evoked cutting-edge questions around biblical interpretation, human rights, and pastoral ministry<sup>25</sup>. The Ugandan context involves a combination of colonial legal systems, African cultural values, and Christian moral teaching, so the debate is more complex<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Loughlin, G. (2004). Pauline Conversations: Rereading Romans 1 in Christ. *Theology & sexuality*, 11(1), 72-102.

<sup>18</sup> Moberly, W. (2000). The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Debate about Homosexuality. *Theology*, 103(814), 251-258.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, N. T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One: Chapters 1-8*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>20</sup> Dunn, J. D. (1988). *Romans 9-16* (Vol. 2). Dallas: Word Books.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, S. K. (1980). The "Righteousness of God" in Romans. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 99(2), 241-290.

<sup>22</sup> Moo, D. J. (1996). *The epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

<sup>23</sup> Loader, W. (2017). Reading Romans 1 on homosexuality in the light of Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman perspectives of its time. *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 108(1), 119-149.

<sup>24</sup> Keener, C. S. (2011). *Romans: a new covenant commentary*.

<sup>25</sup> Caldwell, J. (2010). The viability of Christian same-sex unions: Why scripturally normed faith communities must support homosexual relationships. *Theology & sexuality*, 16(1), 59-76.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, J. E. (2007). *Paul and ancient views of sexual desire: Paul's sexual ethics in 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 7 and Romans 1* (Vol. 354). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Against this background, it is necessary to test how Romans 1 is interpreted and used within Uganda's own religious and socio-cultural context<sup>27</sup>.

The use of Romans 1 in anti-homosexual apologetic has to be weighed against the overall message of love, grace, and inclusion of the New Testament<sup>28</sup>. Some theologians argue that Paul's denunciation of same-sex behavior was a contextual criticism and not an absolute moral norm<sup>29</sup>. Others argue, however, that Paul enforces the created order of male-female complementarity and that this affirmation remains normative<sup>30</sup>. Such conflicting arguments create theological tensions within and across Christian communities<sup>31</sup>. Any exegesis of Romans 1 thus has to be textually based as well as pastorally sensitive<sup>32</sup>.

Finally, reading Romans 1:18-32 in the Ugandan context involves a sensitive interplay of biblical loyalty, theological depth, and social responsibility<sup>33</sup>. It calls for an honest engagement with the historical-critical horizon of the text and Greco-Roman sexual ethics<sup>34</sup>. It also seeks a contextual theology that articulates the lived reality of LGBTQ individuals in Uganda. This study endeavors to supply such a sensitive exegesis, guided by biblical scholarship, historical awareness, and cultural immersion. Ultimately, the goal is not just to read Paul's words rightly but to consider how they may guide Christian ethics and witness in contemporary Ugandan society<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Dunn, J. D. (1990). *Jesus, Paul, and the law: studies in Mark and Galatians*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>28</sup> Dunn, J. D. (1990). *Jesus, Paul, and the law: studies in Mark and Galatians*. Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>29</sup> Loughlin, G. (2004). Pauline Conversations: Rereading Romans 1 in Christ. *Theology & sexuality*, 11(1), 72-102.

<sup>30</sup> Bell, R. H. (1998). *No one seeks for God: an exegetical and theological study of Romans 1.18-3.20* (Vol. 106). Mohr Siebeck.

<sup>31</sup> Spitaler, P. (2011). An integrative, synergistic reading of Romans 1-3. *Biblical interpretation*, 19(1), 33-71.

<sup>32</sup> Moberly, W. (2000). The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Debate about Homosexuality. *Theology*, 103(814), 251-258.

<sup>33</sup> Whitaker, M. (Ed.). (2025). *Pursuing Perfection: Faith and the Female Body*. SCM Press.

<sup>34</sup> Holden, W., & Buechel, A. (2007). A Bibliography of Resources on LGBT Issues in Religion.

<sup>35</sup> Wengst, K. (2014). Universale Heilsbedeutung Jesu. *Christsein mit Tora und Evangelium*, 144-158.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The importance of my text for exegesis, i.e. Romans 1:18-32, which I have highlighted in my introduction, also points to the problems of homosexuality in Uganda and abroad. Specifically, we have the following problems: (i) The utilization of the text in discussions of sexuality; (ii) Current interpretations of the text that are at variance with the original meaning; (iii) Isolated (out of context) readings of the text that promote a perversion of created purpose of human beings; (iv) The interpretation and use of the text in Uganda's religious and cultural context.

After my historical reading of the text which will bring out the meaning and historical intent of Paul in addressing the Romans in the way he did, I will engage my reading the four problematized areas.

## **1.3 General objective of the study**

The objective of this study is to conduct a historical reading of Romans 1:18-32 and to consider its current usefulness in homosexuality concerns in Uganda and abroad

## **1.4 Specific objectives**

- i. To give the historical background of Romans
- ii. To conduct a literally analysis of Romans.
- iii. A detailed exegesis of Romans 1:18-32.
- iv. To consider the usefulness of the historical reading of Romans 1:18-32 in various current issues of homosexuality.

## **1.5 Literature Review**

This study has made use of Bible commentaries and note collections covering the entire New Testament, primarily the Epistles. Works that discuss the Pauline Epistles or specifically the Epistle to the Romans are included in the list below. With a few notable exceptions, works primarily of a popular or practical nature have been left out because,

despite their potential value, they have nothing in common with the work's purely exegetical nature.

The books of published on Romans are;

A Theological Survey of Encountering the Book of Romans, Second Edition. By Walter A. Elwell (Series Editor) and Douglas J. Moo (Author). A renowned evangelical New Testament scholar provides an approachable and up-to-date reading guide to the book of Romans in this revised edition of his popular textbook. The new model includes a fresh internal design and has been completely overhauled. Douglas Moo guides readers through the weighty argument of this important book by addressing basic issues, setting the stage for reading Romans, elucidating challenging parts, and examining the book's ongoing significance.

An Introduction to the Romans, Fourth Ed. By Antony Kamm and Abigail Graham. A succinct, engaging, and thorough overview of the Roman world, The Romans: An Introduction delves into 1,200 years of political, military, and cultural history as well as literature, art, architecture, social tensions, and religion. With themes that are relevant to both ancient and contemporary societies—fake news, class conflicts, urbanization, ideas of race and gender, imperialism, constitutional power, and religious intolerance—this new edition features updated and revised materials aimed at fostering analytical skills in literary and material evidence.

A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature., Cranfield, C. E. B. This is probably the most important Greek lexicon for the New Testament. It is unique among New Testament lexicons in that it covers the New Testament and other early Christian writings. BDAG and the other lexicons mentioned below technically exist within the historical-philological tradition. However, in a different way from the theological dictionaries they are all more descriptive.

The Complete and Unabridged Commentary on the Whole Bible by Matthew Henry, in six volumes. Matthew Henry skillfully blends devotional insight, practical application, and knowledge of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Regarding the nature,

content, and message of God's divine revelation, Henry offers deep insights. Ideal for anyone who wants a thorough commentary on the Bible.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

Biblical research has got several methodologies; however, I have used the historical and literary context to interpret the Bible and specifically the book of Romans. Historical and literary context is essential when one tries to interpret the Biblical text because it helps the reader identify the meaning of a particular section of Scripture (Grand Canyon University," 2019). A common term for historical context is the text's background (also known as contextualization; see Duvall & Hayes, 2012; Klein, Blomberg, & Hubbard, 2004). God made the decision to speak to us in a particular era, among a certain group of individuals, and inside a particular culture (Duvall & Hayes, 2012). These factors make it more important than ever to comprehend these individuals, their origins, and the conditions in which they lived when they composed the Biblical letters (Duvall & Hayes, 2012; "Grand Canyon University," 2019). "The true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken," as Fee and Stuart (2003) correctly point out (p. 30). According to Duvall and Hayes (2012) and Grand Canyon University (2019), historical context frequently includes the Biblical author, the audience, geography, social conventions, economic, theological, and political variables, as well as any other cultural notions within the section of study.

According to Duvall and Hayes (2012), p. 150, literary context "relates to the particular form a passage takes (the literary genre) and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying." The literary context concentrates on a straightforward assessment of the passage's immediate and surrounding environment. One can better grasp the text's actual meaning by determining its meaning by taking into account both the historical background and the surrounding context (Duvall & Hayes, 2012). Furthermore, while considering the literary setting, the genre is crucial. Which genre does the passage belong to—apocalyptic literature, law, poetry, prophecy, wisdom, gospel, history, or a letter? Even subgenres such as sermons, riddles, and parables are worth taking into account (Duvall & Hayes, 2012; Klein, Blomberg, & Hubbard,

2004). When examining the literary context of a passage, one must take all of these factors into account.

This is how Duvall & Hays (2012) summarize literary and historical context: "What do we mean by historical-cultural context? The biblical author, the biblical audience, and any historical-cultural topics the passage itself touches on are typically included in this type of context. Almost anything outside of the text that will aid in your comprehension of the text itself is related to historical-cultural context. The significance of the words and sentences that surround the paragraph you are studying, the structure a passage takes, and the book's argument flow are all examples of literary context, as we will discover in chapter 2.

When it comes to interpreting a word or passage, many theologians assert that context is crucial (Duvall & Hays, 2012; Grand Canyon University, 2019; Klein, Blomberg, & Hubbard, 2004; Plummer, 2010). One theologian properly states context is the 500-pound gorilla that one must not overlook (Barrick, 2008). It has been stated that around 75% of all interpretation errors can be avoided by reading the passages that precede and follow it (Duvall & Hays, 2012, p. 160; Grand Canyon University, 2019).

In biblical studies, there are those who seek to appropriate the historical meaning of the texts they study. This is particularly the case in evangelical scholarship because of their high view of scripture which I subscribe to. Here questions such as: is the message of this text of any relevance today?; is there a similar situation today to the one the Bible text addressed that justifies its application? ; what is of enduring value in the text that ought to be embraced today? What lessons can be drawn from the text for today? Etc are considered in the application of historical readings of scripture. I shall be doing the same in appropriating my reading of Romans 1:18-32.

## **1.7 Outline**

The study is structured into five chapters: Chapter Two reviews the Book of Romans' historical and literary context considering the messenger, audience, place, time, and and purpose with relevant literature on the biblical and theological perspectives of

homosexuality, with a focus on Romans 1:18-32 and its contextual interpretation. Chapter Three presents a historical reading of Romans 1:18-32 by conducting a detailed exegesis of Romans 1:18-32 by looking at every verse beginning from verse 18 and a synthesis of the text. Chapter Four provides the context of homosexual discourse in Uganda and beyond in the four areas of sexuality debates, modern day interpretations, individualistic readings, and interpretations within Uganda's religious and cultural context in light of the text. Finally, Chapter Five provides the conclusion by offering practical thoughts on how homosexuality can be tackled in Uganda in light of my reading of the text and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to successively consider the book's historical and literary the following historical reading of Romans, I shall consider the messenger, audience, place, time, and purpose of Romans.

### 2.2 Historical context

Knowing the personal life of an author enhances the possibility of correctly understanding the writing of the author. Pauline Epistles including Romans must be read and evaluated in terms of the missionary's aims, perspectives, knowledge of events, and principles of selection<sup>36</sup>. Thus, it is worthwhile to outline Paul's life and his surrounding world.

### 2.3 The author of the Romans

This is regarded by all New Testament scholars as an authentic letter from Paul. Paul's letters were naturally maintained by churches, thus it would have been unusual for someone to fake them when he was alive or long after his authentic letters were well-known and widely accepted as authoritative. based on Paul's letters, such as 1 Corinthians, which address particular issues of his time, and other letters that are similar in style, including the majority of the letters, such as Romans. Paul was a polyglot. He was well-versed in Koine Greek as his New Testament letters demonstrated<sup>37</sup>. As a Jew, he learned by heart the Old Testament language from early childhood. When Jesus was spending his early childhood in Egypt and Nazareth, Paul (Saul then) was born in Tarsus, a Hellenized city in Cecilia, as he testified in Acts 2:3. As a pure Hebrew baby, a seed of Abraham, he was circumcised on the eighth day (Phil 3:4-6).<sup>38</sup> Jerome reports that

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<sup>36</sup> Sam K. Williams, "The 'righteousness of God' in Romans," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 2 (Je 1980): 297

<sup>37</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33; Dunn, "Romans 1-8," *WBC* 38:.

James. D. G Dunn, "Romans 1-8," in *Word Biblical Commentary* (ed. Bruce. M Metzger; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), in *Romans 1-8* (ed. Metzger), 38:x.

<sup>38</sup>

Paul's parent were well-off immigrants from Galilee to Tarsus. If Jerome is correct, then Paul could have heard and learned from his parents the Galilean dialect, Aramaic-Hebrew. The teenage Jewish boy, like many Koineans, travelled far for education under Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem Pharisaic school. He was blameless as a righteousness under the law. The Pharisees believed that they were the true Israel who knew God's will by heart.

Also, Saul was influenced by the Greco-Roman culture and Stoic philosophy. The influence is demonstrated in Greek style diatribe or an imagined dialogue. Paul's educational background in Hebrew and Greek equipped him with the Hebrew lamentation language and the skill full use of the Greco-Roman technique of prosopopoeial as well as diatribe if he wanted to do so.<sup>39</sup> He became a religious zealot, or a terrorist when Jesus was executed in April of the year 30 AD. Saul, who regarded himself as a "orthodox" Jew, was fervently dedicated to eliminating apostasy. He went beyond his contemporaries and joined the Pharisaic group, terrorizing the Christian church (Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6; 1 Cor 5:9).

Prior to his conversion, Paul was known as Saul, and he was committed to persecuting Jesus's early followers. Paul was blinded by a vision of the risen Jesus while traveling to Damascus. Paul writes, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong," twice in Romans. At the end of Romans, he elaborates on this claim by working to bring in "the full number of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:25-26). He had long hoped to visit the Christians in Rome so that their faith could support one another (Romans 1:11). He emphasizes that though he has not yet been able to reach them, he has for many years often intended to come but has been hindered (Romans 15:22-24). Justification by faith and the inclusion of Gentiles are two of the major

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<sup>39</sup> "Universale Heilsbedeutung Jesu und bleibende Besonderheit Israels nach dem Römerbrief des Paulus", Christsein mit Tora und Evangelium: Beiträge zum Aufbau christlicher Theologie im angesichts Israels, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014, 144-57 (149-52).

themes of Romans, although D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo assert that "if we were to single out one theme, a good case can be for the gospel."<sup>40</sup>

Paul was already familiar with the lives of the Christians in Rome when he wrote the epistle to the Romans in 57 AD while on his third missionary journey in Corinth. By this point, Jews were permitted to return to Rome, but they did so in a Gentile-dominated church. Understanding the problem is aided by historical knowledge of the church, which was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, with Gentiles having only recently surpassed Jews as the majority. Paul therefore sent a letter to Gentile Christians, but he also makes it clear that he had Jewish Christians in mind.

## **2.4 The audience of Romans**

Claudius's decree from AD 49 had been in effect for seven years when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians in AD 56/57. Aquila and Priscilla were among the Jewish Christians who had been compelled to leave the city, and by this point, some of the banished Jews had returned (Acts 18:2; Rom.16:3). However, the makeup of the church membership must have changed significantly as a result of the deportation of the Jews. Even though the Church was founded by Jews and most likely had Jewish members prior to AD 49, by the time Paul wrote his epistle, the bulk of its members were Gentile.

That there was a large Jewish population in Rome in the first century is well documented, and there is general agreement that the Christ movement in Rome had a Jewish foundation. It was not founded by Paul but was already well established at the time of writing Romans. This demonstrates that Paul was by no means ignorant of the Christ movement in Rome; he knows that their faith is reported everywhere, and enough to be able to pray for them. Likewise, the Romans were not uninformed about him or his gospel, though they may have misunderstood it.

However, non-Jewish Christ-followers of Pauline and other viewpoints were added to the Jewish foundation in Rome, making up a significant section of the Gentile

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<sup>40</sup> Carson, D.A. and Moo, Dauglaus, 2005. Introduction to New Testament.

population, including God-fearers and proselytes, in the Christ movement in Rome. Some of these had possibly migrated to Rome from elsewhere, some of them possibly being Pauline converts, but not necessarily all.<sup>41</sup> Thus a starting point for this section is to stress the need to differentiate between the mixed compositions of the Roman Christ-followers generally, and Paul's actual addressees in particular. To some scholars, it is a very misleading assumption to presume they comprised one mixed group whom Paul addresses in his letter. Indeed, there is so little evidence in the letter of any address to Jews that we can confidently assert that; "Paul's addressees are exclusively gentile."<sup>42</sup>

Whereas there is no explicit evidence in Romans of an address to Jews, there is abundant evidence that the addressees are non-Jews. Thus, while there is no need to deny that Jewish Christ-followers existed in Rome, it must be asserted that Paul writes only to non-Jews. On the other hand, is it conceivable that Paul would write only to some of the Christ-followers and ignore the others of Jewish extraction.

## **2.5 The purpose of writing**

Paul himself attests that his missionary consciousness is the foundation of Romans. This is consistent with the portrayal of Paul in both his epistles and Acts. Paul intended to travel to Jerusalem and present the collection to the poor Jewish Christians after completing a period of missionary work in what is now Greece and Turkey. From there, he would travel west to Rome and then Spain. He had two resolves to support his proposal. Romans would first give a biography of himself as his literary emissary prior to his arrival in the city (Rom 1:10; 15:23-24). Second, Paul would urge the Romans to pray for him when he visited the Holy City because he was aware of how delicate the mission of

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<sup>41</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 1. James D. G. Dunn, *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 1. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (publication place: Fortress Press, 2009), 1. Also see Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) (Downers Grove, USA.: IVP Academic, 2013), 23-26.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* For the New Perspective scholars such as Sanders, Dunn, and Wright, Jews' ethnic ritual laws are boundary markers. The tradition includes mainly food laws, festival laws, and the foreskin cutting law.

bringing the collection to Jerusalem was (Rom 15:30-32). Involving the Romans in Paul's ministry was the goal of both resolutions.

Paul was attempting to enlist Christians at Rome for his intention of starting a missionary endeavor in Spain, which is why he wrote this letter (Rom 15:24). Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, where he would encounter traditionalist Jewish Christians who held that followers of Jesus who were not from the Jewish people should be circumcised and subject to Jewish law. Paul's connection to Judaism and the law is one area where the Pauline landscape has changed during the last ten years.

Paul wrote the letter for a variety of purposes, including sharing the gospel. In the letter, Paul summarized the message of Jesus Christ that he had been teaching. On the way to Damascus, God had summoned him to share with the Gentiles the good news of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ (Gal.1:15-16). What Paul refers to as the reality of the gospel is based on the core beliefs that Jesus Christ is the only way for both Jews and Gentiles to be saved (Rom. 1:16) and that Jesus Christ brings Jews and Gentiles together in a single new community of Jesus' followers.

This suggests that while the letter's message—the good news of God—is conveyed to Rome in writing, it must also be expanded upon and presented in its entirety when Paul visits Rome later on, complete with new words, deeds, miracles, and marvels in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In order to make the sacrifices of the people of the nations acceptable and holy in the eyes of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the Letter to the Romans to remind them of the gracious gift that God had given him: the ability to serve as a servant of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, throughout the world and to provide priestly and holy service to the good news of God. Paul is proud of Christ Jesus, and as the Messiah's ambassador, he is able to carry out all of his apostolic duties. Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:19, 26 all reflect the same idea: all work and effort are for the hearing of faith of all nations.

He therefore plans to use this letter to deliver his message about God's plan of salvation for the Jews first and the Gentiles later. Paul explains the message's significance and

impact in addition to its content. These two ideas did not contradict each other; rather, they enhanced and transformed the Romans' faith in Christ and their readiness to serve him in the apostolic task. The best approach to spread the good news across the nations is probably to set an example of how to behave with love for one another in their new life in Christ, in addition to proclaiming the good news of God about Jesus Christ for everyone's salvation. Paul knows that depending on what transpires in Jerusalem, his trip to Rome might be postponed once more.

Dunn (2009 and 1988) also argues in favor of several parallel reasons for writing Romans:<sup>43</sup> In order to prepare the congregations in Rome for his planned visit (Rom 1:10-15, 15:23-24, 29, 32), to solicit support for his intended mission to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28), to win the support of the Romans for his impending visit to Jerusalem (Rom 15:31), to provide advice on hinted (Rom 12:14-13:7) and explicitly expressed (Rom 14:1-15:7) problems in the Roman congregations, and to provide "a synthesis of [Paul's] theology," which is comparable to what Günther Bornkamm has referred to as Paul's "last will."

Given these several factors, Dunn argues that "it is not necessary to play off these various reasons against each other," but rather that "what needs to be explained above all" is "why the letter takes the form it does." Romans, like the majority of Paul's letters, begins with a greeting before swiftly introducing the gospel.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dunn, J. D. G. 1988, liv-lviii, suggests three: "A missionary purpose"; "An apologetic purpose"; "A pastoral purpose". In *ibid.*, 2009, 863-68, Dunn elaborates a bit more on the motives in writing Romans, summarised in six points. Dunn's six points are described here.

<sup>44</sup> The presence of Jewish community and also Christian community were already present even before Paul. For further details see., Joseph A Fitzmyer, *Romans* (vol. 33; *The Anchor Bible*; NY: Doubleday, 1992), 27- 39 ; M. Reasoner, "Rome And Roman Christianity," ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 854.

## 2.6 Literary context of Romans

This section will give a detailed explanation of the Genre and structure of the book of Romans.

### 2.6 Genre of Romans

The purpose of this subsection is to provide a genre identification and abroad outline of the whole letter to increase the possibility of the correct exegesis.<sup>45</sup> The literary genre of Romans is, without question, an ancient form of letter. Examining the New Testament books, primarily the four gospels, Acts, and Romans, which are written in a simple narrative format. The Gospels and Acts primarily contain narrative materials, like as historical legends and miracle accounts, but they also contain a significant amount of direct conversation, including sayings, speeches, and dialogues. Additionally, narrative remarks and summaries that permeate each work join the actual dialog in these works. Direct discourse makes up the majority of the epistolary literature. The majority of the book's brief narrative content is autobiographical. The author and reader share a lot of knowledge. In this genre, both the author and the audience are generally specified. "I," "We," and "You" are the pronouns that predominate in direct discourse. Homilies and exposition fall within the more general heading of ancient letters.

Ancient letters were often thought to be a replacement for the person's physical presence. Seneca wrote. "I never receive from you without being in your presence forthwith". This was important for Paul because he was often physically absent from his church due to mission work elsewhere. Therefore, since one of the reasons why Paul wrote the Romans was to prepare for his ministry in Rome and partly the letter emphasized the ministry of Christ in his absence, it is very evident that the book of Romans based on Seneca's explanation and its characters as seen above is an ancient letter.

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<sup>45</sup> James. D. G Dunn, "Romans 1-8," in *Word Biblical Commentary* (ed. Bruce. M Metzger; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), in *Romans 1-8* (ed. Metzger), 38:x.

## 2.7 The structure of Romans

Understanding such structure entails understanding the letter's coherence and thought flow. Several scholars have described the structure of the book of Romans differently; Rogers Bowen classified the structure into five (5) part that is<sup>46</sup>,

Part 1. Context and the theme of the letter (Rom 1.1-17). This part is made of two sections according to Bowen, that is Romans 1.1-15 and 1.16-17. According to Bowen, when one person writes a letter to another, he usually gives personal news of himself, makes some comment on the latest news he has received about the other person, explains why he is writing the present letter. Paul did all these things in the beginning of his letter to the Romans. And he did more, before someone starts to read a book, they often ask, 'who is the writer? Is this person qualified to write about this subject? Paul imagined his readers asking the same questions about him, so he showed them how he was qualified to write to them about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Part.2 The one who is righteous through faith (Rom 1.18-32; 2.1-3.20; 3.21-32, 4.1-25). The writer explains, "how can there be friendship and fellowship between human beings and God? Consider what people are like, think of the evil all around us, there at Rome or here in Corinth. Yet we all know that God is good so how can he be friendly with human beings as they are? People's chief trouble is that they just do not want to know God. According to Bowen, a right relationship with God is God's gift to human beings when they turn to him in faith. Like a good doctor, Paul made his diagnosis of human problem in Romans 1.18-3.20, only then Romans 3.21-31, was he ready to explain the good news of God's cure.

Part 3....Will live. This section has six sub-sections; Romans 5.1-11, 5.12-21, 6.1-23, 7.1-25. 8.1-17 and 8.18-39. Paul went to explain how a person becomes right with God. Starting from chapter 5 to 8, Paul starts by describing the first of the freedoms; the Christian is free from the wrath. In these chapters Paul was explaining how one person can make such an immense difference to the whole human race. There is a real

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<sup>46</sup> Roger Bowen, 2009. A Guide to Romans. SPCK International Study Guide, London.

connection between Christ and humankind, which means Christ really does bring to an end described in Romans 5.1-11. In these chapters, Paul emphasizes that some people misunderstand this good news about a new life. They say that if God forgives us freely, then we can live as we like. But they do not know what it means to be “in Christ”. It means that what happened to Christ has happened also to us he died on the cross, we also died, we were buried, we have been raised with him to a new kind of life, as our baptism shows us. We are not what we were. Now we belong to God, not to sin. Sin, which used to control us without our realizing it, has been conquered.

Part 4. The nation of God. This part of Paul’s writing from chapters of Romans 9-11, he wrote about the great sorrow and unceasing anguish because his own people, the Jews, had rejected the blessings. People were always concerned about their own families. Paul gave a clear answer to the concerns that were raised in these chapters. He said that God is sovereign, and free to follow his own will which is not secret or arbitrary but clearly revealed in scripture, and especially in Jesus Christ, to be merciful and loving. His word has been effective in the lives of those he has chosen (Rom 9.6-29), from Romans 9.30-10.21, he says, all people have a responsibility to have faith in God, but Israel as a nation has not had faith, and finally in these chapters Paul emphasizes that God is fulfilling his plans, which includes the conversion of many Gentiles, who came to hear the gospel as result of the Jews’ rejection of it (Rom 11.11-24); the conversion, in the of the nation of Israel, which will take place as result of God’s work among the Gentiles (Rom 11.25-36).

Part 5. The behavior of God’s people. Because God, in his mercy, has done all this for you, you should now live your live or him. Christians must not have too high an opinion of themselves, nor live as isolated individuals. Because we belong to Christ, we belong also to one another like different parts of the body, and we should each do what we can for the whole Christian community.

- Part 1. Context and theme of the letter
  - Romans 1.1-15 Paul and his readers
  - Romans 1.16-17 The theme of the letter

- Part 2. The one who is righteous through faith
  - Romans 1.18-32 Human need: the unrighteousness of the Gentiles
  - Romans 2.1-3.20 Human need: the unrighteousness of the Jews
  - Romans 3.21-31. God's gift: righteousness from God
  - Romans 4.1-25 God's gift: the witness of the Old Testament
- Part 3. Will live
  - Romans 5.1-11 Free from wrath
  - Romans 5.12-21 The two families
  - Romans 6.1-23 free from sin
  - Romans 7.1-25 free from the Law
  - Romans 8.1-17 free from death
  - Romans 8.18-39 free from death (2)
- Part 4. The nation of God
  - Romans 9-11. God's plan for the Jews and Gentiles
  - Romans 9.1-5. The problem of Israel's unbelief
  - Romans 9.6-29 God's sovereignty in mercy
  - Romans 9.30-10.21 Human responsibility
  - Romans 11.1-36 God's plan
- Part 5. The behavior of God's people.
  - Romans 12.1-8 Christian conduct and the common life in the Body of Christ
  - Romans 12.9-21 The life of love
  - Romans 13.1-7 Christian citizenship
  - Romans 13.8-14 Brotherly love and the coming day
  - Romans 14.1-15.13 The weak and the strong
  - Romans 15.14-33 Paul's ministry and future plans
  - Romans 16.1-27 Greeting and hymns of praise.

Despite popular belief, Romans is not a letter essay or rant written for Paul's personal benefit, such as defending his gospel or responding to his detractors. Instead, Romans is an intricate epistle that Paul sent to the church in Rome in order to address a

particular set of conditions there. According to Craig S. Keener, this is how the book of Romans is organized.<sup>47</sup>

- A. Introduction. (Rom 1.1-17). The title of the letter, which names the recipients (as stated in Rom 1:7), is the same as the title of other Pauline letters. Since Christians eventually began collecting Paul's letters, a title is necessary; otherwise, it may have been taken straight from Paul's likely mission statement in 1.16-17.<sup>48</sup>
- B. Made right by Trusting Christ (Rom 1.18-5.11). Paul's careful reasoning in Romans, which frequently flow naturally from one argument to the next, cannot be adequately captured in a modern framework. Although it is impossible to separate Romans 1.18-23 from Romans 1.16-17, we have done so in this instance. Paul makes a strong case in Romans 1.18-5.11 that the only way for a Jew or a Gentile to be righteous is to rely on Christ.<sup>49</sup>
- C. Life in Christ and the Spirit (Rom 5.12-8.39). Paul now discusses the next life, which entails being associated with Christ (5:1-6:11) and the indwelling of the spirit (8:1-39), after discussing righteousness by reliance on Christ's work in Romans 1:17-5:11. True righteousness is produced by this new life in association with God, not just by human understanding of God's just law (Rom 7:1-5)<sup>50</sup>.

Scholars sometimes argue whether Romans 5 belongs in the preceding section on justification because Paul frequently jumps from one idea to the next rather than adhering to a clear hierarchical pattern (Rom 1:16-4:25) or the following one on life (Rom 6:1-8:39). However, in Romans 5:1-11, Paul applies to his audience the concepts that Abraham's paradigm in chapter 4 exemplifies; in Romans 5:12-21, Paul switches from Abraham to Adam, and the new life in chapter 6 is a direct result of Romans 5:12-21. As a result, I think it could be easiest to place Romans 5:1-11 in the preceding part and Romans 5:12-21 in the subsequent one,

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<sup>47</sup> James R. Edwards, 1992. Romans. Bakerbooks, Grand Rapids Michigan.

<sup>48</sup> Craig S. Keener, 2009. Romans. New Covenant Commentary Series

<sup>49</sup> Craig S. Keener, 2009. Romans. New Covenant Commentary Series

<sup>50</sup> Craig S. Keener, 2009. Romans. New Covenant Commentary Series

given the minority of scholars (like Talbert). The potential for such a divide at least prompts us to consider the significance of the settings that come before and after.

D. The Salvation and Role of Israel (Rom 9:1-11:36). Few academics today hold the same opinion as those who once considered Romans 9-11 to be a digression or perhaps an interpolation from another context. These chapters, far from being a digression, continue the discussion of Israel in Romans 3:1-9, from which Paul somewhat veered off course to discuss the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Christ throughout (Rom 1:16; 2:9-10,13-14; 3:9-29; 4:10-12). The biblical evidence regarding God's historical purposes regarding Israel and the covenant must now be addressed<sup>51</sup>.

E. Living the Life of a Christian (Rom 12:1-15:13). Paul tackles specific, practical questions in the church more directly after building the theological foundation that demands such action, as he does in certain other letters (Gal 5-6; Col 3-4) (hence his "therefore" in Romans 12:1). Romans 12:1-15:13 provides an example of what righteousness in relationships should include, even though a large portion of Paul's letter discusses the ways of righteousness. The question of Jewish Gentile ties in Christ's body is still a major concern in the particular context of Israel (Ch. Rom 9-11), as is particularly clear in Rom 14:1-15:13. The practical ideas that link Paul's emphasis on God's intention to create a people of both Jews and Gentiles (Ch Rom 1-11, particularly. 9-11) with the particular conflicts the Roman churches are encountering (Rom 14:1-15;7) are found in teaching about serving one another (Rom 13:8-10).

F. Romans' conclusion (Rom 15:14-16:27). Paul wraps up his letters with some crucial closing remarks (Rom. 5:14-33; see also 1 Corinthians 16:1-18). After that, he offers last greetings (Rom. 16:1-16, 21-23), exhortation (16:17-20), and praise (16:25-27).<sup>52</sup>

1. Introduction (Rom 1:1-17)

i) Paul's greeting (Rom 1.1-7)

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<sup>51</sup> Craig S. Keener, 2009. Roman. New Covenant Commentary Series

<sup>52</sup> Craig S. Keener, 2009. Romans. New Covenant Commentary Series

- ii) Thanksgiving (Rom 1.8-15)
- iii) Good News of salvation (Rom 1.16-17)
- 2. Made Right by Trusting Christ (Rom 1.18-5.11)
  - i) Inexcusable Idolatry (Rom 1.18-23)
  - ii) Sexual sin (Rom 1.24-27)
  - iii) God's Impartial Judgement (Rom 2.1-16)
  - iv) Indicting Hypocrisy (Rom 2.17-24)
  - v) God's faithfulness (Rom 3.1-8)
  - vi) All under Sin (Rom 3.9-20)
  - vii) God's Solution for All (Rom 3.21-31)
  - viii) Abraham righted by faith (Rom 4:1-8)
  - ix) Father also of Gentiles who believed (Rom 4.9-12)
  - x) The promise through faith (Rom 4.13-25)
  - xi) Righted and Reconciled by Christ (Rom 5.1-11)
- 3. Life in Christ and the Spirit (Rom 5.12-8.39)
  - i) Reversing the fall (Rom 5.12-21)
  - ii) Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ (Rom 6.1-11)
  - iii) Do not serve sin (Rom 6.12-23)
  - iv) Freed from Law (Rom 7.7-13)
  - v) The flesh and Sin (Rom 7.14-25)
  - vi) Living by the Spirit (Rom 8.1-17)
  - vii) Present Suffering, future Glory (Rom 8.18-30)
  - viii) Secure in God's love (Rom 8:31-39)
- 4. Israel's Role and salvation (Rom 9.1-11.36)
  - i) Israel Special and beloved (Rom 9.1-5)
  - ii) God's choice not bound by Ethnicity (Rom 9.6-29)
  - iii) Two Approaches to the law and righteousness (Rom 9.30-10.10)
  - iv) Response of Israel and the Gentiles (Rom 10.11-21)
  - v) A remnant (Rom 11.1-10)
  - vi) Fulfilling the promise to Israel (Rom 11.25-32)
  - vii) Praising God's wisdom in history (Rom 11.33-36)

5. Living the Christian life (Rom 12.1-15.13)
  - i) Consider How to serve one another (Rom 1.1-8)
  - ii) Loving every one (Rom 12.9-21)
  - iii) Respecting the state (Rom 13.1-7)
  - iv) Live God's way (Rom 13.8-14)
  - v) Serve the Lord vs Foods and days (Rom 14.1-12)
  - vi) Jewish and Gentile believers must welcome one another (Rom 15.1-13)
6. Closing of Romans (Rom 15.14-16.27)
  - i) Paul's missionary program (Rom 15.14-33)
  - ii) Commending the bearer (Rom 16.1-2)
  - iii) Greetings to Roman believers (Rom 16.3-16)
  - iv) Beware Selfish Teachers (Rom 16.17-20)
  - v) Greetings from Corinth (Rom 16.21-23)
  - vi) Praising God's wisdom (Rom 16.25-27)

I would like to use Roger Bowen's structure to interpret the purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans because it explains intensions of this study. Following Karl Barth's view of Romans, I will borrow his argument to explain the "wrath of God" as indicated from Romans 1:18-32 under the structure of Rogers Bowen. Karl Barth describes human beings not as they are before the gospel comes, but as they are in the presence of the gospel but in the absence of faith. When people reject God's offer of mercy, they are under his wrath. This will give us a firm foundation to explain Romans 1:18-32. As explained above Part 2 of Bowen's structure, I would like to explain Romans 1.18-32, "Human; need the unrighteous of the Gentiles" which follows under the explanation of Part 2.

Rom. 1.18-32, the Gentiles and their relationship with God. We may think that some of the details are not true of the people we know. But if we concentrate on the main points Paul made, we shall probably find that it is an accurate picture of people as they are today. His thought seems to have progressed like this; People know God, they reject God, they worship other gods, God leaves them to live as they have chosen, they get further and further from the Knowledge of God, their relationships with one another

are spoiled, people live in misery. Therefore, it is this content that I will focus on to discuss the ungodliness and wickedness in today church.

## CHAPTER THREE: A HISTORICAL READING OF ROMANS 1: 18-32

### 3.1 Introduction

If it is read in isolation from the surrounding context of 1:18–3:20 and from the larger rhetorical structure of the epistle, Romans 1:18-32 seems to be little more than a typical Jewish critique of Gentile idolatry, with subtle hints at past Jewish lapses into idol worship (particularly the golden calf incident in Exodus, as Paul alludes to in his echoes of Ps 106:20 [105:20 LXX] in v. 23).<sup>53</sup> Indeed, as many commentators have noted, this pericope strongly parallels portions of Wisdom of Solomon 12-16, and so echoes much of the same critiques of the Gentile world and pagan idolatry which that document and other intertestamental Jewish documents contain. And while Romans 1:18-32 is certainly not less than a Jewish critique of Gentile idolatry, it is also much more than that, especially within the larger section of Romans 1:18–3:20. In an effort to stymie any sort of Gentile Christian superiority over their Jewish brethren, Paul launches into a devastating leveling argument against pagan idolatry (and by extension, the Gentile culture that surrounds it) in Romans 1:18-32. This is followed by an argument against hypocritical pagan moralism in Romans 2:1-16. Both of these leveling arguments against Gentile superiority are then followed up in Romans 2:17–3:20 with an equally devastating critique of a “censorious” (to borrow Witherington’s descriptor) non-Christian, Jewish teacher.

Thus, Romans 1:18-32 does not merely stand alone as a Jewish critique of Gentile, idolatry-rooted unrighteousness, but as the opening salvo in a two-stage attack on both Gentile and Jewish ethnic and moral superiority.<sup>54</sup> Paul will leave no ethnic or moralistic high ground for his audience either Jew or Gentile to be able to boast from. This serves to leave open the faithfulness and work of Christ the primary way in which the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* has been and still is being revealed in the world as the only basis for

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<sup>53</sup> C. K Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans* (ed. Henry Chadwick; Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Clark Black, 1971), 27

<sup>54</sup> Dunn, “Romans 1-8,” in WBC, 38:54

boasting, and one that places Jews and Gentiles on the same plane: “the people of God who, by grace through the response of faithful trust, are “in Christ.” Wright offers an excellent and concise treatment of the place of Romans 1:18–3:20 (and by extension Romans 1:18-32) within the larger structure of Romans:

“The present section, then, is far from being a mere exposé of human sinfulness. Within the architecture of the whole letter, it begins the construction of several great arches, which, having reached their various peaks in reference to Jesus the Messiah, come back to earth in the specific conclusions of the different stages of the argument.” Thus, when exegeting and interpreting Romans 1:18-32, it is imperative that we not only keep in mind its contextual placement within the larger section of Romans 1:18–3:20, but also its placement as the opening salvo of Paul’s larger argument comprising his *probatio*, which then leads into the central *refutatio* of chapters 9-11 later in the epistle.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.2 Detailed exegesis of Romans 1:18-32

I will conduct my detailed exegesis of this text by looking at every verse beginning from verse 18.

**Romans 1:18:** With the opening statement of his *probatio*, Paul begins to lay out how exactly the righteousness of God is being revealed in the present, as he has just stated in his *propositio* of Romans 1:16-17. Interestingly enough, Paul begins this explanation by showing how God’s wrath is currently being revealed, as denoted by the present, passive, indicative verb, ἀποκαλύπτεται, at the very beginning of the sentence. It is Paul’s usage of γὰρ here that lets the reader know unambiguously that God’s wrath is directly connected to His righteousness. Indeed, just as God’s righteous is being revealed (1:17) so too is His wrath being revealed against all unrighteousness.<sup>56</sup> By using γὰρ at the beginning of this pericope and at the beginning of the whole *probatio*, Paul is establishing both a logical connection to, and contrast with, the *propositio* of 1:16-17. The connection exists precisely because the ὀργὴ θεοῦ is directly connected to the

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<sup>55</sup> Barret, The Epistles to The Romans, 33

<sup>56</sup> Barret, The Epistles to The Romans, 33

δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. The contrast exists in that God’s righteousness is manifested either as salvation to those who are trusting in God and Christ, or as righteous wrath on those who have willfully exchanged the truth of God and suppressed that truth in unrighteousness.<sup>57</sup> In this sense the righteousness of God is a “double-edged sword”; it simultaneously cuts the bonds of sin for those who place their trust in Christ (as Paul will go on to explain in chapter 6 of the epistle) and righteously punishes those who have “exchanged the truth of God for the lie.” As Emil Brunner notes: “God’s wrath is the ‘adverse wind’ of the divine will which he [the rebellious human] comes to feel who runs into it.”<sup>58</sup>

It is important to note Paul’s rhetorical placement of words in Romans 1:18. Having just spoken of the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Romans 1:16-17, Paul then goes on to speak of the ungodliness and unrighteousness (ἀδικία) of those people “who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness” (ἐν ἀδικίᾳ). Paul thus contrasts the δικαιοσύνη of God with the ἀδικία of sinful pagan idolaters. This stark contrast between righteousness (as it is being revealed in God’s righteous wrath) and unrighteousness (as is seen in those pagan idolaters who suppress the truth of God) helps to set the stage for Paul as he begins his treatment of the moral unrighteousness of sinful and rebellious Gentiles, thus beginning the first of many leveling arguments in the probatio.<sup>59</sup>

**Romans 1:19-20:** Having established that the wrath of God is currently being revealed conterminously with His righteousness (indeed it is God’s righteousness as experienced by those who are suppressing His truth), Paul proceeds to explain why God’s wrath is being revealed. This is clearly seen by Paul’s usage of διότι at the beginning of v. 19, which serves to mark off v.19 as a causal, subordinate clause of v. 18.<sup>38</sup> Paul thus proceeds to explain the egregious nature of the “suppressing of the truth” in v. 18. This suppressing of the truth, this ungodliness and unrighteousness against which God’s wrath is being revealed, was not the result of mere ignorance of God. For God made

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<sup>57</sup> Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans*, 33

<sup>58</sup> Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans*, 33

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, “Romans 1-8,” WBC 38; Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans*.

the knowledge of Himself evident to humans, indeed, evident among them, for the evidence of the Creator is the very ordered universe which they which we live in<sup>60</sup>.

Having established that the knowledge of God was (and is) evident to Gentiles even without their being given the special revelation of the Law, Paul fleshes out how exactly this knowledge was made evident to them by God in v. 20. Paul has already hinted at this in v. 19 by saying that “what is known about God is evident among them.”<sup>61</sup> Here he states explicitly that God’s key attributes as Creator—namely His eternal, infinite power and His unique divine nature that are ontologically distinct from the creation—have been, and are being, understood and discerned clearly by Gentiles. Note the present, passive, indicative participle and verb, respectively, here: *νοούμενα* and *καθορᾶται*. These two present, passive, indicatives combined with the prepositional phrase *ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου* (“from/since the creation of the world”) serve to show that not only was the knowledge of God made evident in the past, but is still being made evident right up to and through the present time. Thus, it is not for lack of evidence from the created universe that the ungodly and unrighteous can claim their excuse. God has made Himself known as Creator by means of His creation, and so as Paul says “humans are without excuse” in their suppression of the knowledge of God in unrighteousness, even Gentiles who were not given the Law. Rather than being ignorant (which would be excusable) they have willfully and consciously suppressed and restrained the all-too evident truth of God as Creator.

Romans 1:21-23: Having described the reasonable justification for the revelation of God’s wrath against Gentiles who did not have the Law, Paul further delineates the reasoning behind God’s righteous wrath in vv.21-23. Just as with v. 19 Paul begins the causal, subordinate clause that comprises v. 21 with *διότι*, which serves to show that it is further explaining what has just been laid out in v. 20. Paul, reiterating v. 18 and the “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,” explains that even though God has made the knowledge of Himself as Creator evident among the Gentiles, they still refused to

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<sup>60</sup> Dunn, “Romans 1-8,” WBC 38; Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans*.

<sup>61</sup> Dunn, “Romans 1-8,” WBC 38; Barret, *The Epistles to The Romans*.

give Him glory (ἐδόξασαν) as the Creator God and willfully denied thanks (ἠύχαρίστησαν) to Him for the gift of life which He had given to them. As Dunn helpfully notes, Paul also begins to move into more identifiably Jewish categories of critique in this portion of his argument. The use of aorist verbs like ἐδόξασαν and ἠύχαρίστησαν are reminiscent of Jewish understandings of acknowledging God as the one, true Creator God, precisely by giving Him glory and thanks. More importantly still though, these willful denials of giving glory and thanks to the Creator God are echoes of the primal sin of humanity. As Dunn notes: “This failure to give God his due and to receive life as God’s gift is Paul’s way of expressing the primal sin of humankind.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Paul foreshadows in v. 21 what will be made evident in vv. 22-23, that Gentile idolatry is rooted in and echoes the primal sin of willful rebellion in Eden.

Having conveyed this, Paul immediately moves into the terrible results of this suppression of truth: “they were rendered futile in their reasoning and their senseless heart the center of their personhood and moral will was darkened.” In willfully and rebelliously cutting themselves off from God, Gentile idolaters lost sight of the source and ground of being and life Himself. As finite, contingent creatures they had severed their lifeline to the Personal Source of eternally-existent life and reason. Indeed, they had cut themselves off from the Logos himself, through whom all of contingent creation was made, and in whom they “live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28 NASB). It is interesting that when Paul speaks of their heart being darkened, he does not use the third person plural of either καρδιά or of the verb σκοτιζω. Instead, both are in the third person singular. Paul seems to be communicating what is true of the corporate body of Gentile humanity; their corporate heart as the human race was darkened. In speaking of a darkening of the heart of Gentiles as a whole, Paul again seems to be echoing Genesis 3 and the effects that one man’s action has had on all his descendants. If this is the case, then it is likely that Paul is subtly foreshadowing the synkrisis of Adam and Christ that will come later in Romans 5:12-21. At any rate, Dunn, again, sums up the matter well: “Paul’s point is that man’s whole ability to respond and function not least as a rational being has been damaged; without the illumination and orientation which

comes from the proper recognition of God his whole center is operating in the dark, lacking direction and dissipating itself in what are essentially trifles.”

Paul proceeds into v. 22, showing how, in this state of rebellious darkness, those Gentiles suppressing the truth of God claimed to be all the more wise. Yet the irony is that, rather than truly becoming wise, they became foolish! It is here, in vv. 22-23, that Paul begins to echo Genesis 3 very heavily. The short statement in v. 22 alone seems to suggest the story of the serpent tempting Eve in the Garden. There, the serpent told her that she would become wise and knowledgeable if she was to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but by believing such a lie, she (and later Adam) would be cast out of the Garden and cut off from the Tree of Life. “Claiming to be wise, they became fools”.

The echoes of Genesis 3 become even more pronounced as Paul moves into v. 23. Here Paul begins a three-fold recurrence (the other two occurrences come in v. 25 and v. 26) of people exchanging (ἀλλάσσω in v. 23 and μεταλλάσσω in vv. 25-26) an aspect of God’s truth for a false reality. Here in v. 23 Paul says that Gentile idolaters have “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God with the likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds, and of four-footed animals, and of reptiles.” Paul’s use of rhetorical antithesis is in full effect here, as he contrasts the glory of the incorruptible, immortal God with the likeness of an image of corruptible and mortal man. This “likeness of an image” is meant to show how foolish Gentile idolaters have become in their suppressing of the truth. Not only did they exchange the glory of the incorruptible Creator God for something finite, but it is not even a full image, only a likeness of an image! Barrett communicates this concept well in his translation of the verse: “for the mere shadowy image of corruptible man.”

Going further still in his critique of Gentile idolatry, Paul says that not only did Gentile idolaters exchange the glory of God for the mere likeness of an image of man, but they also exchanged it for the corruptible likenesses of even lesser creatures, such as images “of birds, and of four-footed animals, and of reptiles.” As has been noted by many commentators, Paul here seems to be deliberately echoing Psalm 106:20 (Psalm 105:20

in the LXX), which in turn is lamenting Israel's shameful, idolatrous worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32. It is highly likely that he is also echoing Jeremiah 2:11 here. This serves as a reminder to any Jewish Christians who heard Paul's letter read out, that the Jews were not wholly without excuse when it came to idolatry. More importantly though, it serves as the first foreshadowing of Paul's later leveling arguments which relocate all people (both Jew and Gentile) as falling short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and as either being "in Adam" or "in Christ," as he will show in his synkrisis of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21. That synkrisis in turn leads into Paul's rhetorical impersonation of the bondage of sin that is experienced both in the non-Christian life (again, both of the Jew and the Gentile) and in Adam, in vv. 7:7-25.

One way to interpret this passage is as humanity without the gospel. To put it another way, there is no one who is righteous and all people are "universally under sin." The terms "righteousness of God" and "wrath of God" are used in opposition to one another. The revelation of both is interesting. One relates to the particular revelation that God has given to the Jewish people, which is how he holds them responsible.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, God's covenantal connection with Israel is related to God's righteousness. The expression "ὀργή θεοῦ" refers to God's wrath, which is an act of God more than His attribute and a response against human unrighteousness. According to Barret, Paul uses the same tense for God's wrath of God as for God's righteousness; in other words, "wrath of God" is an ongoing process. Paul argues that it is not ignorance of truth but intentional rebellion against God that has sparked God's wrath, so no one is righteous and no one has an excuse (Vv 20-21). Man dethroned God and put himself in his place because he denied the "righteousness of God," which resulted in idolatry and pointless thought. The phrase "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God" refers to this. Since people have rejected the ultimate reality, which has tainted reason, the objective pursuit for truth has become pointless.<sup>63</sup> As a result, it created spiritual complacency, relationship inequalities, and conflicts inside the self.

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<sup>62</sup> Dunn, "Romans 1-8," in WBC, 38:54.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, A New Man in Jesus, 60.

**Romans 1:24-25:** Having explained why God’s righteous wrath is being revealed against the unrighteous Gentiles who have been suppressing the truth in vv.19-23, Paul now proceeds to explain the exact nature of this wrath. Paul begins this new section by use of the inferential conjunction Διὸ at the very beginning of v. 24. This conjunction causally links God’s punishment which Paul is about to lay out in vv. 24-25—with the preceding verses, “For this reason [the Gentile exchange of the glory of God for idols] God gave them over...” Verse 24 also marks the first occurrence of a second three-fold verb recurrence set in 1:18-32, with v. 23 beginning the first three-fold verb recurrence set in the pericope with “exchange” (ἀλλάσσω/μεταλλάσσω). This new, second recurrence set involves the third-person singular, aorist, active, indicative verb παρέδωκεν [first person singular: παραδίδωμι] (“He gave them over”), stated here in v. 24 and then again in v. 25 and v. 26.

**V.25,** Paul again resorts to heavy echoes of Genesis 3. It seems highly likely that in saying “they exchanged the truth of God for the lie,” Paul is referencing Adam’s willfully giving up the truth given to him by God for the lie of the serpent in the Garden. While most English translations have something along the lines of “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” I would contend that this type of translation is incorrect and misses much of what Paul is trying to convey in his intertextual echoing of Genesis 3. The prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ ψεύδει utilizes an articular object of the preposition, τῷ ψεύδει. If Paul wanted to convey that the truth of God was exchanged for a generic lie, it seems more likely that he would have used a non-articular construction. The fact that he deliberately utilizes an articular construction seems to indicate that he is letting his audience know that it is not simply a lie, but the lie, the primal lie of the serpent, which led to the Fall.<sup>53</sup> Given how saturated 1:18-32 is with echoes of Genesis 3, it seems that Paul’s usage of the article before ψεύδει here is deliberate and communicates a significant pointer and linkage of idolatry-rooted sin to the primal sin of Adam. Again, this is further bolstered by the fact that two key, later sections of Paul’s probation 5:12-21 and 7:7- 25 heavily rely on the stark contrast between Adam and Christ. Even with something as grammatically small as a definite article, Paul is foreshadowing and laying the groundwork for the later, key portions of his probatio.

Having provided another heavy echo of and linkage to Genesis 3, Paul connects the primal sin of Adam to the collective sins of Gentile idolaters by saying, “they worshipped and served the creation instead of the Creator,”. This seems to harken back to v. 22 when Paul said that Gentile idolaters became fools. How foolish it is to worship the creation instead of the One who created it! It is as if one thanked their house, rather than the contractor who constructed it. Paul then concludes v. 25 with a brief doxology to God. It is almost as if Paul’s mere discussion of such rebellious, foolish, and vulgar idolatry has left a bad taste in his mouth and so to get rid of it he gives glory to God in the middle of the discourse.

These verses describe God’s retributive justice. The statement “God gave them up” should be interpreted as God’s reaction to man’s willful disobedience. There are three instances of this phrase (V 4, 6, 8). The word “παρέδωκεν” is employed rhetorically in each of these verses to highlight the continuous judgment. Here, sin—sin against oneself (Vv. 24-25) and sin against others (vv. 26-32)—is viewed as God’s wrath and the reason why God gave them up. Self-disgrace is the direct result of this judgment. Men degrade themselves when they dishonor God.

**Romans 1:26-27:** Having just explained how Gentile idolaters had exchanged the truth of God for the lie in vv. 24-25, Paul goes on in vv. 26-27 to provide two concrete examples of what happens when God gives humans over “in the lusts of their hearts, to vile immorality, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.” The clear linkage of v. 26 back to v. 24 comes with Paul’s use of the noun ἀτιμία in v. 26. This shares the same root with the verb ἀτιμάζω, which Paul uses in infinitival form in v. 24. Thus, Paul is describing the most notable and visible examples of such “dishonoring of their bodies” in vv. 26-27.

In v. 26, immediately following the second recurrence of “gave them over,” Paul again uses the recurring verb “exchanged” (μετήλλαξαν) to show how Gentile females, in their rebellious, unrighteous state, exchanged the natural sexual relations with men for sexual relations with other females, a practice “contrary to nature.”<sup>57</sup> There are several key points of interest within vv. 26-27. The first, is that Paul does not use the

typical words for women and men, γυνή and ἀνήρ, here. Rather, he uses the words θήλειαι and ἄρσενες, which translate to “females” and “males” rather than “women” and “men.” As Gagnon notes, this is likely a deliberate choice on Paul’s part, as a means of echoing Genesis 1:27, which in the LXX uses the singular forms of the words: θήλυς (female) and ἄρσεν (male). Thus, Paul is rooting his view of proper sexual relations here in God’s creative intent for human beings before the Fall of Adam. This makes anachronistic claims that Paul did not know about sexual orientation superfluous to Romans 1:26-27, for the simple reason that Paul has in view here God’s intended pre-Fall sexual ethic. Thus, even if Paul knew about the thoroughly modern (or thoroughly post-modern) conception of sexual orientation, his stance would remain unchanged, for such inborn, distorted, and damaged sexual orientations are products of the Fall, and so still far from God’s creative intent for human beings.

Indeed, since 1:18-32 both begins and foreshadows much of the later, weightier arguments of the probatio—namely the Adam-Christ synkrisis of 5:12-21 and the “I” impersonation of non-Christians and Adam in 7:7-25—it is not surprising that Paul would use homosexual behavior as the primary example of being “contrary to nature” as a contrast to what is in accord with nature. As Paul will show in chapter 5, all those who are “in Adam” are still enslaved to sin and unrighteousness and are part of the old, fallen age. But as Christ is the “Last Adam” and has proleptically inaugurated God’s new creation right in the midst of the old, so all those who are “in Christ” are freed from such bondage and begin to take part in this proleptic new creation now. Thus, any distorted sexual orientation and the willful acting on that orientation, is recognized for what it is: a product of the systemic, damaging effects of the Fall and of the personal damaging effects of those who are suppressing God’s truth in unrighteousness; those who are “in Adam.” But those who are in Christ are being made new and healed in the present, and so see distorted and fallen sexual orientations and acting on those orientations for what they are: distorted and fallen, and so not at all what God intended for His creatures. This means that even Christians who struggle with a distorted sexual orientation are no longer enslaved to follow it, but are genuinely freed to resist the fallen temptations

and impulses of such fallen sexual orientations. It is the defiant, willful act of homosexual practice not inborn, distorted orientation—which Paul condemns here.

Paul makes sure to leave no ambiguity in this section as he explains in v. 27 how Gentile males “abandoned natural relations with females” and committed “shameless deeds with males receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error.” Paul wants to make clear here that God’s wrath is an awful thing for unrighteous humans, simply because it leaves them to be slowly destroyed and dehumanized by their own self-chosen rebellion. Further still, homosexual behavior and its willful exchanging of God’s natural, creative intent for His creatures with the unnatural, destructive opposite is the prime example of Gentile idolaters “exchanging” God’s truth God’s creative intention for the world—for the lie, and then being punished by being given over and allowed to slowly destroy their own humanity by means of their unrighteous rebellion. Richard Hays says it well:

“Paul specifically highlights homosexual activity because he believes it offers a particularly vivid illustration of how human fallibility warps God’s created order. In order for man and woman to join together, be fruitful, and multiply, God the Creator created them. Humans who “trade” these established roles for homosexual activity represent the spiritual state of people who “traded the truth of God for a lie.”

Paul is clear here about homosexual practice. It is both a result of the fallen world, as well as of God’s “giving over” of those who have chosen to rebel against Him. It is fundamentally in opposition to God’s creative intent for human beings. No “enlightened” or “modern” view of human sexuality will change that, because such unrighteousness is fundamentally centered on behavior what humans choose to do—not on orientation. Even those Christians who are born with damaged and distorted sexual orientations are still called and enabled to resist the temptation to act on such impulses. This is precisely because such an orientation is a result of the Fall and so not God’s will and original, creative intention for His creatures.

**Romans 1:28-31:** Having just provided a vivid, concrete example of the μετήλλαξαν - παρέδωκεν sequencing in vv. 26-27, Paul proceeds to cap off his argumentation against

Gentile idolatry and the defense of God’s righteous wrath against it, with the “rhetorical K.O.” of a vice list, showing just how wicked and unrighteous Gentile idolaters have become.<sup>62</sup> This vice list is introduced in v. 28 by means of the final usage of παρέδωκεν, “God gave them over.” The end of this three-fold verb recurrence helps to signal the coming completion of the argument and rounds out the μετήλλαξαν - παρέδωκεν interchange that Paul has used throughout the pericope. This is combined with a rhetorical antithesis of δοκιμάζω - ἀδόκιμος (“did not approve to have God in knowledge, God gave them over to a disapproved mind”). While this rhetorical antithesis is hard to render into English, in the original Greek the audience would have heard and understood the full effect such a rhetorical antithesis—combined with the final παρέδωκεν recurrence would have had. Gentile idolaters refused to approve and acknowledge God, so God gave them over to their choice and the result was that, having cut themselves off from the source of life, being, and rationality Himself, their own minds became debased in knowledge.

Paul transitions directly from the “things which are not proper” as a result of a debased mind at the end of v. 28, to an extensive vice list stretching from v. 29 through v. 31. It is doubtful that Paul was simply trying to name specific Gentile vices here, as there are far more than just what is in the list and not every single Gentile committed every single one of these acts. Rather, the list is meant to have a rhetorical effect, layering one egregious vice on top of another for full rhetorical force.<sup>64</sup> Paul is seeking to build a stark contrast here at the beginning of his probatio, between the idolatry-rooted evil and unrighteousness of fallen Gentiles, and the sheer light and beauty of the righteousness of God that is being revealed in the gospel. This is evident at the beginning of the list itself by Paul’s usage of ἀδικία, the antithesis of the δικαιοσυνη θεοῦ. This stark contrast will be made even more evident with the conclusion of the probation and refutatio, wherein Paul begins his ethical exhortations to his audience in Romans 12:1-21 by presenting a “virtue list” of Christian behavior, which includes virtues that are almost the polar opposite of the various vices listed in 1:29-31.

**Romans 1:32:** Paul concludes 1:18-32 by reiterating one final time, that such unrighteousness and sinful behavior is not the result of ignorance. As Paul has already made

clear, God has made the knowledge of Himself as Creator evident, so that even Gentiles who are without the special revelation of the Law, are without excuse. The unrighteous Gentile idolaters know very well the “righteous regulation of God,” that those who deliberately disobey and rebel against God are worthy of death. More echoes of Genesis 3 can be seen here, wherein God explicitly told Adam that death would be the penalty for eating of the tree and yet Adam “exchanged the truth of God for the lie.” Despite this, not only do Gentile idolaters continue to commit such unrighteous and wicked actions as portrayed in the vice list, they actually encourage others to do them as well! The moral depravity stemming from rebellion against God and idolatrous behavior has reached its depraved depth in this statement. Not only do such idolaters gradually destroy and dehumanize themselves, they seek to take others down with them.

Three differences in connections with God, oneself, and others are the results of human rebellion against God. Paul talks about how human disobedience against God causes relationships to be uneven. Paul emphasizes that God's anger is a continuous process by using the rhetorical device of "God gave them up" once more. One of God's required characteristics or attributes in response to human rebellion is retributive justice. God's wrath leads to a perversion of ethics and morals. Paul lists a number of vices in this context, and sexual immorality is one of them (V 27-31). Many academics contend that God's anger is only directed at Gentiles because of these vices. These vices, however, show that both Jews and Gentiles were abandoned to sin. Paul is not concentrating on any one sin, but rather on how willful rejection of God's righteousness, which was reaffirmed in verse 32, distorts one's behavior and relationships with others. Those who condoned such immoral behavior were viewed as even more immoral.

### **3.3 A Synthesis of Romans 1:18-32**

Roman 1:18-32, at first glance, seems out of place. Hasn't Paul just spoken of the righteousness of God that is being revealed in the gospel in his propositio? Why then does Paul speak of the wrath of God against unrighteousness in the beginning pericope of his probatio? On closer examination, however, one can see that Paul's thoughts on the wrath of God being revealed against all human unrighteousness are a natural next

step in his argumentation. The good news of God is precisely that He has made good on His promises, through the faithfulness of His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, not only is salvation being brought about for all those who are believing, but the evil, sin, and unrighteousness that have corrupted God's beloved world and creatures for too long, are also finally being dealt with. The δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ that is being revealed shines its light and truth on all of reality, for it is Reality. For those who respond to it in faith and trust, it is the power of God for salvation, "for the Jew first and also for the Gentile." For those who stubbornly persist in their rebellion and suppression of God's truth, it is the righteous judgment—the "giving over" of the unrighteous to their self-chosen and self-destructive rebellion—upon sin in the present, which will be completed in the eschatological judgment in the destruction of all evil and sin, including those who have irreversibly oriented themselves away from the truth of God. Thus, Roman Romans 1:18-32 is not a strange, seemingly random insertion at the beginning of the letter, but rather lays the groundwork for other key parts of Paul's argument. This is particularly evident in its repeated echoes of Genesis 3 and the primal sin of Adam, which will later be fleshed out and placed in stark contrast to the greater victory that has been achieved by the "Last Adam," Jesus of Nazareth. Romans 1:18-32 thus stands as one of the pillars upon which Paul builds his forceful probatio about the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.

In the next chapter, I will put to use this reading of Romans 1:18-32 in various current context of issues of homosexuality.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ROMANS 1.18-32 AND HOMOSEXUAL DISCOURSE

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an application of Romans 1:18-32 into four areas on homosexual discourse: sexuality debates, modern-day interpretations, individualistic readings, and interpretation within Uganda's religious and cultural context.

### 4.2 Romans 1:18-32 and in sexuality debates

Biblical condemnation of same-sex behavior on the basis of divine authority: Romans 1:18-32 is generally regarded by conservative theologians and pastors as the Bible's most clear condemnation of same-sex behavior, on the basis of the inspiration of Scripture and the apostolic authorship of Paul. In Uganda, this passage is quoted regularly by church leaders in sermons, public statements, and policy discussions as if it were a heavenly legal code addressing directly today's debates about homosexuality<sup>64</sup>. This is founded on the conviction that the moral norms articulated by Paul are timeless, spanning the cultural gulf between first-century Rome and twenty-first-century Africa. This reading takes Paul's words at face value as a clear condemnation of homosexual practice, without necessarily weighing the historical, rhetorical, and theological dynamics of the passage. Practically, the citation of Romans 1 functions as an unstoppable divine verdict, with minimal room for differing interpretation or delicate pastoral application, especially in the midst of the incendiary social and political climate of Uganda<sup>65</sup>.

'Dishonorable passions' and 'unnatural relations' as deviations from created order: Paul's description of 'dishonorable passions' (πάθη ἀτιμίας) and the exchange of natural relations for those 'against nature' is widely interpreted in Ugandan Christian discourse as proof that homosexual acts are not part of God's created order<sup>66</sup>. In this interpretation, "natural" is understood to point to the Genesis account of male-female creation

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<sup>64</sup> Detwinya, A. (2020). *Apostle Paul on homosexuality: a critical analysis*.

<sup>65</sup> Furnish, V. P. (2010). *The moral teaching of Paul: Selected issues*. Abingdon Press.

<sup>66</sup> Fredrickson, D. E. (2000). *Natural and unnatural use in Romans 1: 24-27: Paul and the philosophic critique of Eros*.

and the procreative potential within heterosexual union. So any deviation from this pattern—whether in thought, desire, or action—is a distortion of God's plan for human sexuality. This reading has strong resonance within Uganda's religious culture, where appealing to "God's created order" carries significant moral force. This reading has a tendency to lift out the sexual aspect from the larger theological framework of Romans 1, where such behavior is traced back to a deeper problem of denying God as Creator. By focusing primarily on the sexual dimension, the broader diagnosis of idolatry and universal human sinfulness can be marginalized, which subtracts from the richness of Paul's argument<sup>67</sup>.

'Against nature' as male-female complementarity: The phrase "against nature" (παρὰ φύσιν) has traditionally been understood in Christian theology as a reference to the God-given complementarity of male and female bodies and roles. In Ugandan pastoral teaching, this has been tied in with a "design argument," in which anatomical, reproductive, and relational differences between men and women are interpreted as the most evident sign of God's purpose<sup>68</sup>. Heterosexual marriage is thus posited as the natural order, instituted for companionship and procreation, with same-sex activity characterized as a willful clash with that design. The appeal to "nature" also echoes natural law reasoning, which has been predominant in both Western and African theological debates. In Uganda, this reading has been used not only in churches but also in legal discourse to argue that same-sex relations are a violation of God's law as well as the moral order of society. But it has a tendency to take "nature" for granted, without attention to how Paul's appeal to the term is shaped by his Jewish worldview, along with the Greco-Roman world of his hearers<sup>69</sup>.

Gagnon's natural law and reproductive complementarity emphasis: New Testament scholar Robert A. J. Gagnon's extensive study of the Bible and homosexuality has been

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<sup>67</sup> Welborn, L. L. (2011). Paul and Pain: Paul's Emotional Therapy in 2 Corinthians 1.1–2.13; 7.5–16 in the Context of Ancient Psychagogic Literature. *New Testament Studies*, 57(4), 547-570.

<sup>68</sup> Groene, R. (2023). *Narratives of Paradise, Decline, and Restoration In Roman and Early Christian Texts: A Comparison*. Kent State University.

<sup>69</sup> Boyd, L. (2013). The problem with freedom: Homosexuality and human rights in Uganda. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86(3), 697-724.

highly influential in conservative interpretations of Romans 1 in Africa, including Uganda<sup>70</sup>. Gagnon argues that Paul's condemnation of same-sex behavior is rooted both in the creation narrative and in the universal logic of natural law, which stipulates reproductive complementarity of male and female. In Ugandan theological education and church literature, Gagnon's book is frequently cited as an academic affirmation of what is intuitively understood by most pastors—that the biblical testimony concerning same-sex behavior is consistent across Old and New Testaments and founded on the created order<sup>71</sup>. This intellectual affirmation lends the church's position further credibility, especially in public debate where biblical teaching is called into question. But while Gagnon's paradigm emphasizes moral clarity, its implementation in Uganda fails to match Paul's rhetorical strategy in Romans, which aims not just to unearth specific sins but to humble all humanity before God's grace<sup>72</sup>.

Pastoral teaching linking homosexuality to overall human rebellion: The majority of Ugandan pastors and church leaders interpret Romans 1:18-32 not as an isolated moral prohibition but as part of a grand narrative of humanity's rebellion against God<sup>73</sup>. In this pastoral framework, homosexual behavior is interpreted as one external symptom of a deeper spiritual malady namely, the intentional suppression of truth and the worship of the created world instead of the Creator Himself (Romans 1:25). This allows preachers to link sexual immorality with other social vices such as corruption, greed, and violence and hold all of them out as fruits of the same root problem of idolatry. In a Ugandan context, this message becomes highly applicable because it addresses concerns with moral decadence and social disorder. Yet in practice, pastoral attention still manages to be more on homosexuality than on the other listed sins in Romans 1,

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<sup>70</sup> Gagnon, A. (2015). Natural fertility and longevity. *Fertility and Sterility*, 103(5), 1109-1116.

<sup>71</sup> Gagnon, J. H., & Parker, R. G. (2013). Conceiving sexuality. In *Conceiving sexuality* (pp. 3-16). Routledge.

<sup>72</sup> Wamala, M. M. (2017). *Grace and Human Transformation: A Theological Approach to Peace and Reconciliation in Uganda* (Doctoral dissertation, Boston College. School of Theology and Ministry).

<sup>73</sup> Tabi, J. I. (2017). *The challenge of African Christianity to human rights: exploring the response of the Diocese of Kampala in the Anglican Church of Uganda to Human Rights* (Master's thesis).

conveying the impression that it is a uniquely grave sin rather than one among many indicators of fallen humanity<sup>74</sup>.

GAFCON's appeal to Romans 1:26-27 in Ugandan church documents: The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), a highly influential conservative Anglican movement in Uganda, has on several occasions used Romans 1:26-27 to reaffirm traditional Christian teaching on sexuality and to resist same-sex marriage. Publicly, GAFCON leaders cite Paul's words as an timeless standard, casting acceptance of homosexual practice as a departure from "biblical orthodoxy"<sup>75</sup>. In Uganda, where the Anglican Church holds a prominent place in society, this reading of Romans 1 has shaped denominational policy, influenced political legislation, and undergirded public opinion against LGBTQ+ acceptance. The GAFCON position is also a point of ecumenical solidarity with Ugandan conservative churches. However, while its use of Romans 1 affirms strong commitment to Scripture, it interprets the passage more as a moral law text with less sensitivity to Paul's theological intention in using this argument to pave the way for the universalizing message of Romans 3:23<sup>76</sup>.

Formulating sexual ethics as faithfulness to God's creational norms: In Uganda, many Christian communities formulate their sexual ethics in terms of faithfulness to God's creational norms, a criterion they believe is reiterated in Romans 1<sup>77</sup>. The argument is that since God created male and female for union in complementarity, fidelity to that pattern is obedience to the Creator. Any sexual activity outside of this order, including homosexuality, is therefore a breach of covenant faithfulness. This argument often appeals both to Scripture and to observed biology, reinforcing the perception that Christian ethics are aligned with the natural order. Although this is a coherent moral argument, it sometimes distracts from Paul's broader pastoral intent—to demonstrate that all human persons, regardless of their particular sins, stand in need of grace. In the

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<sup>74</sup> Detwinya, A. (2020). Apostle paul on homosexuality: a critical analysis.

<sup>75</sup> Bongmba, E. K. (2015). Hermeneutics and the Debate on Homosexuality in Africa. *Religion and Theology*, 22(1-2), 69-99.

<sup>76</sup> Muonwe, M. (2021). Homosexuality debate and prospects for Anglican-catholic ecumenical relations. *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)*, 5(1).

<sup>77</sup> Salzman, T. A., & Lawler, M. G. (2012). *Sexual ethics: A theological introduction*. Georgetown University Press.

Ugandan situation, this type of emphasis risks turning Romans 1 into a passage about "them" rather than a mirror for "us," and thus lose its convicting power for all<sup>78</sup>.

One-dimensional usage overlooking universal sinfulness and grace: A common shortfall in the Ugandan application of Romans 1:18-32 is that it can be used one-dimensionally highlighting the sinfulness of homosexuality without the balancing emphasis on the universality of sin and the requirement of grace<sup>79</sup>. In Paul's rhetorical structure, Romans 1 is not the end of the argument but the first part of a larger case that reaches its climax in the declaration that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). If the passage is used primarily to condemn one group, it can reinforce self-righteousness in the hearers and undermine Paul's aim of leveling the moral playing field. In the Ugandan context, this selective application can result in social stigmatization rather than gospel invitation, particularly to sexual minorities. A more nuanced exegesis would therefore keep the emphasis on the universal necessity for repentance and grace for all human beings<sup>80</sup>.

Overshadowing of the original rhetorical purpose: Paul's original rhetorical purpose in Romans 1:18-32 was to unveil the moral decadence of the Gentile world as a way of leading into his larger theological point that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin<sup>81</sup>. In contemporary Ugandan controversies, the passage is being read as a stand-alone condemnation of homosexuality, severed from its role in Paul's argument. This can result in a disproportionate focus on sexual immorality as the centerpiece, instead of one illustration in a much larger picture of human revolt. Getting inside Paul's rhetorical drift is important: his purpose is not merely to identify particular sins but to illustrate that no one is righteous in their own right. If this is overlooked, Romans 1 is

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<sup>78</sup> Farley, M. A. (2006). *Just love: A framework for Christian sexual ethics*. A&C Black.

<sup>79</sup> Cahill, L. S. (1989). *Between the sexes: Foundations for a Christian ethics of sexuality*. Fortress Press.

<sup>80</sup> Gaca, K. L. (2003). *The making of fornication: Eros, ethics, and political reform in Greek philosophy and early Christianity* (Vol. 40). Univ of California Press.

<sup>81</sup> Lobo, E. (2021). *Conformed to the image of Christ: An intertextual study of the significance of Pauline image-lexical passages for Paul and the gentile problem*.

transformed into an instrument of moral condemnation rather than a stepping stone toward the universal gospel invitation to salvation<sup>82</sup>.

Contemporary application is not nuanced: Despite the fact that Romans 1 is widely referred to within Ugandan discussions of sexuality, its contemporary application is often devoid of the nuance a whole, contextual exegesis would provide<sup>83</sup>. A more nuanced approach would consider the cultural background of Paul's readers, the specific idolatrous practice he was addressing, the meaning of the key Greek terms, and how his argument develops into chapters 2 and 3. Without this sensitivity, application can be superficial—reducing the passage to a proof-text against homosexuality without interacting with its theological richness. In Uganda, where the passage is widely used in heated public debate, this type of oversimplification risks entrenching positions rather than making space for thoughtful conversation. A more nuanced, contextually aware use of Romans 1 would maintain its moral clarity while also honoring its broader gospel purpose: calling all individuals, regardless of affliction category, to repentance and new life in Christ<sup>84</sup>.

#### **4.3 Romans 1:18-32 and current interpretations**

Increasingly, progressive scholars have held that Paul's words in Romans 1:26-27 are not addressed to all same-sex unions in all configurations, but to exploitative, coercive, or involuntary sexual relations that were being prevalent during Greco-Roman times. They note that during Paul's time, pederasty (relations between adult men and younger boys), and slave sex abuse, were ordinary as part of society but immoral, and routinely confused with systems of oppression and abuse of power. Paul's use of "dishonourable passions" and "shameless deeds" might thus have been interpreted by his readers as aimed at those exploitative situations, and not at committed and mutual same-sex

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<sup>82</sup> Kim, T. H. (2007). *The origin of Paul's concern for the gentiles and Paul's gentile mission* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).

<sup>83</sup> Oluwatoba, R. P., Ogundeji, A., & Oluwatoba, G. T. (2024). Christian Sexuality and Postmodernism: The Emerging Issues. *Lead City Journal of Religions and Intercultural Communication*, 2(2), 218-238.

<sup>84</sup> Mtenje, A. L. (2016). *Contemporary fictional representations of sexualities from authoritarian African contexts* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

unions. In contemporary Uganda, however, the passage is often used as a generic condemnation of all homosexual identity, and in a way that blurs the difference between abusive behavior and voluntary adult sex a step that such scholars would regard as distorting the probable historical target of Paul<sup>85</sup>.

It is believed by some translators that Paul's initial rebuke was aimed at pagan temple prostitution and not against consensual same-sex relationships. In ancient fertility cults, particularly those in the honour of gods like Cybele and Aphrodite, sex acts, including homosexual sex, were part of ritual worship for the purpose of securing agricultural blessing or divine favour. This reading situates Romans 1:26-27 within the broader context of Paul's argument in verses 18-25, which is that the end of idolatry is humanity, having turned away from the Creator, defiling its own body in counterfeit acts of worship. Here, then, Paul was not concerned with personal sexual morality for its own sake, but with the pollution of worship and the subjection of the human body to idol service. This is a reading that challenges Ugandan religious discourse, which appropriates Romans 1 and separates it from its idolic context to be used instead as a clear-cut instrument in political and moral debates over homosexuality<sup>86</sup>.

Hermeneutic interpreters observe that Paul's use of "natural" (φυσικός) and "unnatural" (παρὰ φύσιν) do not necessarily refer to an objective moral principle based on creation sequence, but to what was culturally "usual" or "unusual" in his day.<sup>13</sup> In Greco-Roman oratory, "against nature" might be used to describe actions contrary to social expectation, rather than necessarily actions contrary to divine ordinance. If Paul were employing the term in this classical sense, then his impulse could have been in terms of behavior that was considered transgressive under his audience's cultural script, rather than issuing an absolute moral demand. That is seldom the intent of Ugandan Christian

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<sup>85</sup> Fredrickson, D. E. (2000). Natural and unnatural use in Romans 1: 24-27: Paul and the philosophic critique of Eros.

<sup>86</sup> Welborn, L. L. (2011). Paul and Pain: Paul's Emotional Therapy in 2 Corinthians 1.1–2.13; 7.5–16 in the Context of Ancient Psychagogic Literature. *New Testament Studies*, 57(4), 547-570.

teaching, which prefers to assume "against nature" is an eternal and universal ethical judgment irrespective of the semantic evolution of the term in antiquity<sup>87</sup>.

John Boswell and other scholars have argued that Paul's condemns homosexuals in Romans 1 are heterosexuals who abandon their "natural" sexual orientation toward members of the opposite sex for lust-driven or excess-oriented homosexual acts. The interpretation is based on Paul's "exchange" language, giving up something natural "for them" read by Boswell as implying a personal abandonment of one's natural sexuality. That is, the vice is not homosexual activity strictly speaking, but to act against one's own nature. While roundly attacked within conservative scholarship, such an interpretation has influenced progressive theological projects urging same-sex relations to be welcomed. In the Ugandan context, where debate tends to focus on the legitimacy of same-sex identity as such, Bosboyd's thesis introduces a very different paradigm challenging the legitimacy of wholesale bans<sup>88</sup>.

Some textual scholars even question whether Romans 1:18-32 is even written in Paul's voice, and instead suggest it was added as a later interpolation. According to them, the passage reads very much like Jewish moralising polemics against Gentile immorality, and might have been inserted to bring the letter closer into agreement with such tradition. If this theory were true, then these verses would not be accepted as authoritative Pauline teaching on sexuality. This theory has, however, not been widely accepted since the majority of scholars see the language and theology as consistent with what is written by Paul in other books. However, the fact that there even exists such a debate attests to the contested status of appeals to Romans 1 in Ugandan contexts, where the text is typically considered to be unequivocally Pauline and thus beyond question<sup>89</sup>.

Others suggest that Paul's catalogue of vices in Romans 1 was written with rhetorical purpose rather than as a rigid theological code. On this view, Paul was overstating the

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<sup>87</sup> Groene, R. (2023). *Narratives of Paradise, Decline, and Restoration In Roman and Early Christian Texts: A Comparison*. Kent State University.

<sup>88</sup> Boyd, L. (2013). The problem with freedom: Homosexuality and human rights in Uganda. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86(3), 697-724.

<sup>89</sup> Gagnon, A. (2015). Natural fertility and longevity. *Fertility and Sterility*, 103(5), 1109-1116.

sinfulness of Gentiles deliberately to bring Jewish hearers on board, then turning the polemic on them over in chapter 2 by asserting that all are guilty before God. This "rhetorical trap" is that the list, such as excluding same-sex acts, actually forms part of a larger theological strategem to level the moral ground, but not an independent moral code. This reading invites Ugandan readers to question whether their prophetic usage of Romans 1 overwrites its position within Paul's wider argument about generalized sinfulness.

Such rhetorical hypersensitivities highlight Paul's polemical style, which was prone to using strong, stereotypical language for enemies in order to establish some broader theological claim. In ancient world moral rhetoric, it was common practice to portray "the other" most egregiously in order to buttress an argument. If Paul's comments here in Romans 1 are playing by that rulebook, then isolating verses 26-27 out of the argumentative situation risks distorting their purpose. In Uganda, where the verses tend to be quoted out of context during political orations or church homilies, this danger is particularly pronounced, since the rhetorical and dialogical character of the text is overcome by its polemic power<sup>90</sup>.

These alternative readings also press back against conservative traditions by demanding a reading attentive to cultural context, linguistic nuance, and rhetorical purpose. They warn against importing 21st-century terms like "sexual orientation" into Paul's text, with the danger of misreading, since the world in which he was writing did not conceptualize in terms of our 21st-century notions of fixed sexual identity. People were largely classified according to their sexual acts and social roles, not by an internal identification. For Uganda, where legal and social structures are increasingly shaped by modern identity categories, the recognition of this earlier discontinuity would enable more circumspect and less anachronistic treatment of the biblical text<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Wamala, M. M. (2017). *Grace and Human Transformation: A Theological Approach to Peace and Reconciliation in Uganda* (Doctoral dissertation, Boston College. School of Theology and Ministry).

<sup>91</sup> Gagnon, J. H., & Parker, R. G. (2013). Conceiving sexuality. In *Conceiving sexuality* (pp. 3-16). Routledge.

All of these interpretations note that Paul is not actually interested in Romans 1 to single out homosexual activity as particularly abhorrent sin, but to show the universal consequence of human abandonment of God. Homosexual activity is found on a catalog of vice along with greed, envy, falsehood, gossip, and disobedience to parents all signs of idolatry's corrupting power. Overemphasizing one sin at the expense of others distorts Paul's theological purpose, which is to show that all have sinned and all need grace. In Uganda, however, singling out homosexuality as the pinnacle of moral decay risks diverting the entire scope of Paul's accusation<sup>92</sup>.

While these understandings remain contested and sometimes summarily dismissed within African theological tradition, they offer a potential of the church engaging Romans 1 more exegetically more accurately and pastorally more sensitively. Within the polarized socio-political climate of Uganda, where Romans 1 is likely to be used as a weapon, they offer tools for passing beyond proof-texting to a reading that engages context, intention, and the broader message of the gospel. This would moderate polarisation, foster humility, and ensure that Scripture is handled in a way that is both true to its original purpose and relevant to the concerns of present-day pastoral ministry<sup>93</sup>.

#### **4.4 Romans 1:18-32 and isolated readings**

Removing Romans 1:26-27 from its literary context generally causes us to have an unbalanced perspective on God's created purpose, viewing homosexual individuals as specifically damned and totally not focusing on universal sinfulness of humans.<sup>21</sup> When read out of context, the passage is apt to deceive us into thinking Paul's major concern lies with sexual orientation rather than humanity's overall rebellion against God and subsequent immorality. In Uganda, such reductionist reading is standardly employed in public, religious, and political rhetoric to stigmatize and render people worthy of punitive action due to homosexuality as a social evil. Such reductionist reading not only undermines theological integrity but also threatens pastoral care by putting judgment

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<sup>92</sup> Tabi, J. I. (2017). *The challenge of African Christianity to human rights: exploring the response of the Diocese of Kampala in the Anglican Church of Uganda to Human Rights* (Master's thesis).

<sup>93</sup> Bongmba, E. K. (2015). Hermeneutics and the Debate on Homosexuality in Africa. *Religion and Theology*, 22(1-2), 69-99.

before guidance, grace, and the holistic ethical formation of believers based on biblical mandate.

This reductionism also disregards the fact that Romans 1:18-32 begins with a universal diagnosis of human depravity, and not specifically aiming at homosexual acts as the most detestable sins.<sup>22</sup> Paul's initial verses state that all mankind suppresses the truth about God through unrighteousness in different forms of rebellion, such as idolatry, jealousy, dishonesty, and moral degeneration. In Uganda, ignoring verses 18-25 when addressing homosexuality can sow moral myopia, under which one sin is elevated above others, creating an unbalanced ethical hierarchy. A just reading demands the awareness that all human beings, regardless of sexual inclination, are responsible before God, demanding equity, moral consistency, and spiritual humility.

Selective citation of "unnatural" sexual acts removes Paul's statement from his broader context of idolatry, truth withholding, and moral breakdown.<sup>23</sup> The verse ties the exchange of natural relations to worshipping creatures rather than the Creator, pointing to the reality that sexual sin is symptomatic of a larger spiritual rebellion. In Uganda, it has been forgotten partly in some policy and church debates, leading to overemphasis on homosexual acts in proportion to other structural social sins like corruption, violence within the home, or greed. The integrated reading shifts sexual acts onto a continuum of human sin, a reminder to church leaders and society that the text's ethical critique is aimed at the root of human rebellion against God, not one behavior in isolation.

Misuse of Romans 1 as an isolated proof-text can produce legalistic condemnations that demonize individuals rather than inviting everyone to repentance and redemption.<sup>24</sup> For example, exclusion or public shaming of suspected same-sex students in Ugandan high schools illustrates the effort at using Scripture as a weapon. Rather than molding morals from the gospel, such behaviors can foster fear, resentment, and deception, opposite from true discipleship. A contextualized reading emphasizes the universality of sin and access to grace, urging restorative in preference to punitive responses, and highlighting the pastoral imperative to bring all people up in love and responsibility.

Theological distortion occurs whenever Romans 1 is applied to exclude or dehumanize instead of bringing about gospel-guided transformation.<sup>25</sup> Selective reading has been used in Protestant Uganda to justify social exclusion, support homophobic bills, and determine moral panic regarding sexuality, presenting certain groups as morally second-class or socially dangerous. Such uses distort Paul's purpose, which is to uncover the widespread influence of sin and precipitate repentance, not to exclude certain groups. Theologically sound use demands both God's justice and grace be brought together, recognizing the intrinsic worth of all people while combating sin fully.

A balanced exposition highlights that Paul lists homosexual sins within a series of envy, murder, malice, deceit, and slander (vv. 29-31), highlighting the comprehensive character of sin.<sup>26</sup> Careful reading locates homosexual behavior as part of a broader human habit of disobeying God. To Ugandan church leaders and teachers, a sense of this larger ethical landscape can situate sexuality within a broader moral imagination that holds together all of sin. This method discourages hyperfocus on one behavior, encouraging a broad pastoral ethic and upholding allegiance to biblical teaching on morality and righteousness.

Isolated readings miss the redemptive trajectory of Romans, where judgment is ultimately met with justification and grace.<sup>27</sup> Paul's argument moves from the disclosure of human sinfulness to the demonstration of God's provision of salvation in faith in Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). Ignoring this trajectory could result in people having a skewed perception of God as vindictive instead of compassionate, an issue with direct pastoral implications for Uganda, where youth might grapple with sexual identity issues. A complete contextual reading underscores that sin is diagnosed by the law, yet grace forgives, leaving all sinners hope no matter what kind of sin they commit.

Lacking contextual integrity, Romans 1 is abused as a club rather than a theological mirror that reflects the human condition.<sup>28</sup> In Uganda, targeted reading of the passage often creates moral panic, shapes policy rhetoric, and serves as a basis for school disciplinary action against LGBTQ+ students. When the passage is read as a whole, it serves as a mirror to the entire human nature for denying God and calling for investigation and

confession. It is a style that prioritizes pastoral sensitivity and educates communities on the wholistic nature of sin, promoting equity and reducing inordinate stigma.

Eigramatic interpretation is required to understand Romans 1 in the broader gospel context where all are sinners but all are called to be saved.<sup>29</sup> Paul is not calling for exclusion or demonization of individuals due to some acts, but for emphasis on the call to repent and God's favor to all. In Uganda, the understanding leads to pastoral strategies that lead youth stepping into sexual identities with care, guidance, and spiritual counseling. In highlighting accountability as well as redemption, schools and churches can ethically interact with sexual matters without causing debilitating stigmatization or psychological damage.

Thus, eschewing the readings in isolation is key in preserving theological integrity as well as pastoral sensitivity.<sup>30</sup> Placing Romans 1:18-32 in its literary, historical, as well as theological context enables Ugandan Christians to interact with the passage responsibly without reducing it to simplistic proof-texting while affirming the authority of Scripture. Contextual hermeneutical approach results in balance in approaching sexuality, teaching that all sin is sinful, all people are guilty, and all are given redemption by Christ. It maintains God's moral design integrity, promotes ethical consistency, and equips pastoral leaders to faithfully and sensitively serve in the sociocultural environment of Uganda.

#### **4.5 Romans 1:18-32 and Uganda's religious and cultural context**

Romans 1:18-32 is also repeatedly invoked by church leaders, political leaders, and policymakers in Uganda to justify draconian anti-LGBTQ+ stances.<sup>31</sup> The section is universally employed as a biblical proof-text, quoted in sermons, policy debates, and public discourse to sanction moral condemnation of same-sex sex. Emphasizing Paul's lines on "dishonorable passions" and "unnatural relations," religious leaders define the passage as a divine injunction against homosexuality. This type of usage demonstrates the close interaction between social policy and theology, as a means of demonstrating how Scripture may shape moral understanding and legislative response in a Christian majority country.

The religious discourse of Uganda has tended to describe homosexuality as a foreign import and violation of long-standing cultural mores, invoking Romans 1 to cite proof that such practices are contrary to the order of God and culture.<sup>32</sup> Ministers and media consistently argue that homosexual relationships are not merely immoral but also alien to Ugandan societal traditions. This interpretive context blends biblical authority and nationalist sentiment, affirming a sense of LGBTQ+ identities as exterior corruptions rather than interior qualities of human variation. This makes Romans 1 a vehicle for maintaining cultural and religious homogeneity.

Public claims by institutions associated with GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) and other conservative Christian groups specifically call on Romans 1:26-27 to compare homosexuality with moral revolt and with the decline of society.<sup>33</sup> Sermons, press releases, and public address use the passage to validate that homosexual acts go against God's natural order and equate moral downfall with social disruption. Here, therefore, Romans 1 is less a theological exercise on human sin and more of a forum for the confirmation of doctrinal orthodoxy and the codification of national moral rhetoric.

Cultural fascination with "unnatural" sexuality also underlies stigma and rationalizes punitive policies like school expulsion, criminal punishment, and social exclusion.<sup>34</sup> By defining gay relationships as inherently deviant, religious and cultural authorities offer moral justification for social exclusion based on the appeal to Romans 1 as objective proof of fault. This strategy maximizes public fear and exclusion, mixing up theological interpretation and cultural policing, instead of delving into the text's wider meaning regarding common human sin and the call for grace.

Schools have at times disciplined or expelled students in the name of moral and biblical authority under the guise of Romans 1.<sup>35</sup> For example, what has been happening at schools like Mbarara High School is a demonstration of how meaning from texts has direct consequences for administration action that arises in disciplinary measures against assumed same-sex-active students. Such measures are usually done with

theological sophistication, regardless of the text's wider context about idolatry, universal human sin, and the redemptive path of grace.

Such habits often proceed without careful theological explanation or pastoral reflection, summarily reducing same-sex relations to cultural debasement and divine abandonment. Hasty reduction of sophisticated moral issues into a single proof-text is capable of distorting the moral and religious dimensions of Scripture. Reducing LGBTQ+ activity to only being abominable causes authorities to overlook the larger teaching of Romans on universality of sin, idolatry, and responsibility to God.

Such interpretations have powerful cultural consequences, producing psychological trauma, social isolation, and spiritual disaffiliation among LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly among school-age children.<sup>37</sup> Fear of "outing," rejection by family and church, and corrective discipline can amplify mental health challenges and forge cultures of shame and secrecy. This makes it all the more necessary in Uganda to practice responsible hermeneutics, as it highlights the real-world consequences of misusing Romans 1 without pastoral sensitivity and care.

There are also some Ugandan pastoral counselors and psychologists who challenge punitive responses to same-sex behavior and instead advocate for a more compassionate response aimed at care, guidance, and pastoral direction.<sup>38</sup> They affirm that the Bible needs to be interpreted as a whole, considering human weakness, the universal nature of sin, and the redemptive nature of grace. The integration of these aspects of understanding along with theological teaching can create an even-handed approach that upholds ethical standards without creating harm or marginalization.

A Ugandan contextual exegesis of Romans 1 must balance biblical faithfulness with pastoral awareness and cultural awareness.<sup>39</sup> It involves reading the text within the broader theological context of Paul: human disobedience to God is voiced through a variety of sins, not just sexual sin. By setting homosexual behavior within that broader moral context, religious leaders can provide advice that is biblically based but sensitive to the daily realities of LGBTQ+ individuals, leading to ethical reflection, not shame.

This type of hermeneutic encourages a gospel-oriented response that encounters sin and affirms the dignity of all individuals, calling all people to repent and be saved.<sup>40</sup> In Ugandan culture, this approach allows pastors, teachers, and legislators to engage Romans 1 in a way that takes responsibility: exerting moral accountability, encouraging ethical formation, and offering spiritual care, without resorting to exclusion, punishment, or dehumanization. Lastly, it ensures that the text responds to universal human failure and God's grace, offering a model of ministry and social engagement which is both culturally relevant and biblically true.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In analyzing Romans 1:18-32, four main points are brought up: its common usage in sexuality issues, altered meanings that move further from Paul's intent, the danger of isolated and out-of-context readings, and the particular ways that this passage has been utilized in Uganda's religion-saturated culture. An authentic exegesis considers Paul's initial theological frame: human sinfulness rooted in idolatry, cosmic sinfulness, and the progressive need for grace. Within Uganda, using the text must not just encourage condemnation, but initiate avenues for pastoral care, theological humility, and gospel-centered compassion I subject I will touch in my conclusion

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Since this dissertation has dealt on homosexuality as framed within Romans 1:18-32, I would like to conclude my dissertation by offering practical thoughts on how homosexuality can be tackled in Uganda. These practical recommendations I give in the light of my reading of Romans 1.18 32. I turn now to my recommendations in what follows;

**Grounding the Church's approach in Biblical teaching:** The Anglican Church of Uganda may begin by firmly basing its stand on human sexuality on Scripture. Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are biblical foundations for sexual ethics in a theological context.<sup>1</sup> Theologians such as Robert A. J. Gagnon emphasize that adherence to biblical sexual ethics is crucial for the moral formation of the church's and the believer's.<sup>2</sup> By teaching the congregation the biblical understanding of male-female complementarity and God's intention for sexual intercourse, the church can provide its members with a firm theological foundation for resisting the normalization of homosexual practice.

**Strengthening pastoral counseling and discipleship ministries:** The Church can develop solid pastoral counseling ministries addressing sexual identity and morality, equipping clergy and lay leaders to counsel members biblically.<sup>3</sup> John Piper argues that pastoral care must balance love and truth, opposing sin without driving people away.<sup>4</sup> Discipleship programs addressing spiritual growth, prayer, and ethical decision-making can help church members resist cultural pressure and affirm biblical sexuality, encouraging personal responsibility and moral resiliency.

**Promoting marriage and family education:** A central strategy is to highlight biblical marriage and family life as a model for sexual ethics. Ephesians 5:22-33 presents marriage as a Christ-and-Church mirroring covenant, highlighting both relational faithfulness and procreation.<sup>5</sup> The Anglican Church of Uganda can offer workshops, seminars, and premarital counseling that strengthen marital bonds and teach youth about heterosexual marriage's theological and social significance. This course of action affirms moral formation and counteracts messages reducing homosexual relationships to marriage options.

Using scripture responsibly in public discourse: Church leaders must model responsible treatment of Scripture in public discourse. Misreading of Romans 1:26-27 or decontextualized proof-texting can reinforce stigma and legal discrimination.<sup>6</sup> Scholars like N.T. Wright caution against anachronistic interpretation of ancient texts, emphasizing the need for context, culture, and original meaning.<sup>7</sup> The Church can teach members to read biblical passages holistically, without hate and alienation, to gain moral clarity. This ensures public witness is both biblically faithful and pastorally sensitive.

Engaging in youth ministries and ethical formation: Engaging the younger generations with youth ministries can be a preventative solution to resisting homosexual behavior. Proverbs 22:6 stresses early moral formation.<sup>8</sup> A few ministries include mentorship programs, biblical sexuality education, and open forums on ethical topics. By instructing youth in knowledge of Scripture, critical thinking, and moral discernment, the Church can bring up a generation that knows and respects biblical sexual ethics.

Building community support and accountability structures: The Anglican Church can create small fellowship groups and accountability groups where members are encouraged to live out biblical values. James 5:16 highlights the role of confession, prayer, and mutual encouragement in spiritual growth.<sup>9</sup> Theological literature, such as that of Wayne Grudem, argues that communal reinforcement of godly living strengthens individual adherence to biblical standards.<sup>10</sup> Such communities can offer mentorship, pastoral care, and peer encouragement, counteracting the influence of worldly cultural pressures toward homosexuality.

Training clergy and lay leaders in theology of sexuality: Church leaders and clergy require theological education in order to address contemporary sexual ethics discourse meaningfully. Universities such as Uganda Christian University and St. Paul's University prioritize the synthesis of biblical theology and pastoral practice.<sup>11</sup> By strengthening leaders with sound exegetical competence and awareness of social processes, the Church will be able to address cultural pressure, public policy imperatives, and pastoral demands authoritatively and sensitively, so that members are provided with informed counsel anchored in Scripture.

Encouraging cultural revival and morality: The Church can engage in moral instruction within the broader society, advocating for biblical virtues such as chastity, fidelity, and self-control. Titus 2:3-5 calls for older church members to mentor younger Christians in godly living.<sup>12</sup> Theological commentators like John Stott argue that cultural transformation begins with the faithful witness of the church community.<sup>13</sup> Through family workshops, public education campaigns, and character formation programs, the Anglican Church can shape cultural attitudes to sexuality, promoting heterosexual marriage as the biblically intended model.

Pastoral care for LGBTQ+ people: In prohibiting homosexual behavior, the Church must provide loving pastoral care to individuals who experience same-sex attraction. 1 Corinthians 10:13 emphasizes God's gift of strength to resist temptation.<sup>14</sup> Theologians such as Kevin DeYoung urge a balance of doctrinal faithfulness with pastoral sensitivity, so that individuals are not shamed but brought to repentance and spiritual maturity.<sup>15</sup> Through the inclusion of counseling, mentorship, and prayer, the Church can answer the gospel's imperative to love sinners without compromising on biblical sexual ethics.

Collaboration with Church networks and worldwide Anglican bodies: Finally, the Anglican Church of Uganda can secure its position by allying with regional and global Anglican bodies such as GAFCON and the Anglican Communion.<sup>16</sup> Shared resources, theological inquiry, and training programs provide reinforcement to clergy and congregations struggling with contemporary sexual ethics. Such alignments enable the Church to maintain theological integrity, reaffirm moral teaching, and respond consistently to social pressure, while inculturating biblical principles into Uganda's unique religious and cultural context.

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