

Understanding Romans 1:26-27 in the Light of Homosexuality and its implications among Christians in Nigeria

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Abstract:- Homosexuality refer to sexual acts between people of the same gender. The practice of homosexuality is gradually creeping into Christianity and seems to be welcomed by some Christians in Nigeria which has caused laxity to Christian morality and its consequences centering their claims that Paul never condemned the act in Romans chapter 1. There appear to be a misunderstanding and relegation in the understanding of Romans 1:26-27 as it has to do with homosexuality and the consequences of engaging in this act in Christian life. The paper sought to inquire on the notion of homosexuality, discover the right interpretation of the text in context and the penalties for Christians engaging in the act. Historical exegetical Method of inquiry was used in this study. It was discovered that the homosexuality in the text does not in any way support its practice among Christians in Nigeria but rather condemned as ungodliness which has spiritual, psychological and health/Physical implications for its practice.

Key Words: Homosexuality, Christians, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality as a concept is defined as sexual acts relating to or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire towards another of the same sex. It also relate to, or involving in sexual intercourse between persons of the same sex. It refer to as sexual attraction between people of the same sex. A hasty look at the bible by a reader will notice that there is no single mention of homosexuality in the four gospels and no record of Jesus addressing the topic.¹ There are, however, notches of mention of the act of homosexuality in the bible Old and New Testament (Genesis 19:5, Judges 19:221, Corinthians 6:9-10, Leviticus 18:21-22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Timothy 1:8-10). Noticeable among them is Romans 1:26-27. Looking at this bible text in relation to homosexuality, scholars have given diverse interpretation to this text as giving tribute or unacceptance to the practice. Boswell argues that the persons Paul condemned are obviously not homosexual, but homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons. This author submits that Paul says nothing here about persons who are "naturally" of homosexual orientation. This interpretation rests on the observation that the women "exchanged natural relations for unnatural" and that the men "gave up natural relations with women."² Others argue that the real purpose of Paul's reference to homosexual activity is not to stigmatize sexual behavior of any sort, but to condemn the Gentiles for their general infidelity^{3,4}. Another author argue that Paul has used this "mundane analogy" to chastise the Gentiles for the "theological sin" of rejecting the one true God, he drops the subject of homosexuality entirely.⁵ It, therefore, appear that Paul's embargoes against homosexual activity and its reverberation as recorded in Rom. 1:26-27 is either misunderstood or relegated by some Christians and specifically in Nigeria. Because a misunderstanding or relegation of this text and the hostile effect, has not only affected lifestyle but encouraged moral degradation, double standard and confusion among

¹ Naffzinger, Ann. What Does the Bible define as Homosexuality? An article published in www.bustedhalo.com, June 3, 2015 assessed September 13, 2016.

² Boswell, John *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980.

³ Cranfield, C.E.B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. International Critical Commentary*, Vol. 1. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1975.

⁴ Käsemann, Ernst *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1980.

⁵ Furnish, Victor P. *The Moral Teaching of Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press 1979.

Christians in Nigeria. This study sets out to present a noble interpretation of the text in context, expose spiritual, social and health corollary of engaging in homosexual practices.

The significance of this study cannot be overstated since the ultimate aim of every Christian is to spend eternity with Jesus Christ when He comes to take His people home. But if wrongly understood, misrepresented or relegated will surely mislead them in their Christian race.

The scope of this study is mainly Romans Chapter 1. But the background upon which this text can be understood is in the Old Testament book of Leviticus 20. The study will make some vital suggestions and evaluations to this text.

II. LITERARY UNIT

The immediate context of the text is Romans 1:18 -32. This can be seen from the 18th verse where Paul was writing to the Romans on the revelation of the wrought of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who feel they are upholding the truth of God. Chapter two of Romans begin another unit of thought dealing with the failures of the Jews. The larger context of the text is the entire chapter one of the book of Roman that discusses the identity of the writer of the book, it discusses the means of attaining righteousness and living as good Christians.

The Genre

The genre of this text is theological rhetorical. This involves expounding doctrine as the basis for changing attitude and behaviour. This involves formal persuasive speech, and writings.

Structure

A structure of the Immediate Content Romans 1:18-32 is as follows:

A Wrought of God revealed (18)

- i. Against Ungodliness
- ii. Against unrighteousness.
- iii. Holding truth in unrighteousness.

B. Knowledge of God (19-23)

- i. God clearly revealed from creation.
- ii. Understood by the things made
- iv. No excuse for ignorance
- v. Changing Gods incorruptible Nature to Corruption.

C. God rejected them (24-25)

- i. Because of the Lust of the heart
- ii Dishonouring their own
- iii Telling of Lies
- iv Idolatry

D God wrought came upon them(26-32)

- i. Because of lesbianism
- ii. Because of homosexuality
- iii. Fornication
- iv. Deceit
- v. Death as reward.

III. INTERPRETATION AND THEOLOGY

According to Paul's analysis, God's "wrath" against his fallen human creatures takes the satirical form of allowing humans the freedom to have their own way, abandoning them to their own devices. (Rom.1:23-25) These and the following sentences, in which the slogan "God gave them up" occurs three times (Rom.1:24, 26, 28), recurrently drive home Paul's point: idolatry finally debases both the worshiper and the idol. God's judgment permits the sarcasm of immorality to play itself out; the creature's original instinct towards self-aggrandizement ends in self-destruction. The denial to acknowledge God as creator ends in visionless misrepresentation of the creation. The particular immoralities quantified in vv. 24-31, then, serve two basic purposes in Paul's argument. When the text is read with literal precision, these various forms of improper conduct are seen to be indicators not vexations of the wrath of God, punishments inflicted upon rebellious humanity rather like the plagues visited upon the Egyptians in Exodus.⁶ Paul is not warning his readers that they will incur the wrath of God if they do the things that he lists here; rather, speaking in Israel's prophetic tradition, he is presenting an empirical survey of rampant human lawlessness as evidence that God's wrath and

⁶Furnish, Victor P. *The Moral Teaching of Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press 1979.

judgment are already at work in the world. The advanced immoralities also serves to permit Paul's assessment of humanity as deeply implicated in "ungodliness and wickedness" (1:18b). Paul uses homosexuality as an illustration of his point seeing that ungodliness is an unseen evil, he uses a more obvious proof to show that they cannot escape without just condemnation, since this ungodliness was followed by effects which prove manifest evidence of the wrath of God. The meaning of the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* which is translated as "them that defile themselves with mankind" and "effeminate". Makes it obvious from the meaning of the Greek terms that the bible is not morally impartial or supporting homosexuality. Paul therefore, used this marks to demonstrate the apostasy and gross defection of men from God. Paul's portrayal of homosexual behavior is of a primary and illustrative character in relation to the main line of argument; which both Paul and his readers regarded as particularly vivid. Rebellion against this Creator who may be clearly seen in the things that have been made is made intense in the flouting of sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God's creative design. The reference to God as creator certainly induced Paul, as well as for his readers, immediate recollections of the creation story in Genesis 1-3, which proclaims that "God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them," charging them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:27-28). Similarly, Gen 2:18-24 describes Woman and Man as created for one another and concludes with a moral summary: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh." Thus the complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God's creative activity: God has made them to become "one flesh." By way of sharp contrast, in Romans 1.

Paul portrays homosexual behavior as a "self-punishment" of the anti-religion of human beings who refuse to honor God as creator: it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality, figuring forth through "the dishonoring of their bodies" the spiritual condition of those who have "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (1:24-25). Thus, Paul's choice of homosexuality as an illustration of human depravity is not merely random: it serves his rhetorical purposes by providing a vivid *image* of humanity's primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the creator which will receive God's wrought as it was in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:4-10). Paul was in no way supporting homosexuality by this text.

IV. ORIGIN OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality has been documented in western society as far back as the ancient Greeks. Virtually every civilization had some record of the presence of homosexuality from Ancient Greece to Rome to Victorian England to this present day. It came into Africa through the slave trade and was adopted by Negroes which served as passive women who were called "Jimbandaa" in Angola and Congo languages meaning passive sodomites. Homosexuality was a key symbolic issue throughout the Iberian Middle Ages as was customarily everywhere as a congenital disposition or identity focused as non procreative sexual practices. This has spread to different African countries from this point. Homosexual pleasure was indulged mostly by the intellectual and political elite.⁷

V. IMPLICATIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY AMONG CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA

The practice of homosexuality is gradually eating up the society and Church. This situation has become so alarming that it is a criminal offence punishable with 14 years imprisonment as same sex prohibition bill was voted in 2011 by the National Assembly.⁸ Irrespective of the law some Christians still engage in such act that has been condemned both in the bible and society. No doubt, the practice has some implications to anyone practicing it and especially to Christians in Nigeria. The implications include moral, Psychological, Health and Physical implications.

Moral Implications: The Bible is the defining standard for morality which is also the authoritative norm for Christian life and teaching. It has revealed that all forms of sexual immorality, whether homosexual or heterosexual are not right and will lead to God's punishment. Hence engaging in such act will obviously create a destroying gap between God and Man and will lead to eternal death preventing man from gaining eternal life which is the ultimate goal of every Christian (Rom 1:28-32).

Psychological Implications: The practice of homosexuality brings psychological disorder which leads to unhappiness, difficulty in socialization, produces high level of inferiority complex, distress, unnecessary anger and depression⁹ which leads to suicide.⁸ Christians are not to be unhappy individuals and unnecessarily angry which is not in line with the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22), hence the need to avoid such act.

⁷Daniel, Elsenberg. *Homosexuality: Encyclopedia of Medieval Iberia*, (Ed) Michael F Gerli. New York: Routledge press, 2003.

⁸Ikpechukwu, C. "Nigerian Fourteen year senate for gay marriage" available at www.opendemocracy.net accessed 13/9/2016.

⁹Levis, Michael. "Why Homosexuality is Abnormal." *Ethics in Practice* Ed. Hugh LaFollette. England: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

VI. MEDICAL AND PHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS

Homosexual activist attempt to portray their lifestyle as normal and healthy with the idea that it is equivalent to heterosexual counterparts. The media relentlessly propagate the image to be fit, healthy and well-adjusted. However, there are health implications to the practice. Scientist submits that engaging in the practice produces increased number of sexually transmitted diseases (STD)⁹. The act breeds a host of bacterial and parasitical sexually transmitted diseases which affects the right functioning of the penis creating instability and promiscuity in the lifestyle of those practicing such acts.¹⁰

Some of the diseases associated with homosexuality include: Gonorrhoea. This is an inflammatory disease of the genital tract. Gonorrhoea traditionally occurs on the genitals, but has recently appeared in the rectal region and in the throat. Untreated gonorrhoea can have serious and permanent health consequences which include but not limited to infertility, damage to the prostate and urethra which consequently result to death.¹¹

Syphilis: This is a venereal disease that can spread speedily throughout the body over short period of time if left untreated. This causes serious heart abnormalities, mental disorders, blindness and death. It manifest with mildly and painlessly which make some people avoid treatment. Transmission of organism occur fasted with homosexual than heterosexuals.¹² Gay Bowel Syndrome (GBS): This is discussed as disproctitis, proctocolitis and enteritis which are sexually transmitted gastrointestinal syndromes. Many of the bacterial and protozoa pathogens that cause these sicknesses are found in faeces transmitted to the digestive system.¹³

It is however the will of God that Christians prosper and be in good health, the suffering of diseases are not in line with Gods plan for His people(3 John 1:2). But the indulgence of man into what God has condemned and emphasized by Paul indicate that disobedience to the instructions of God will surely destroy Christians in Nigeria. To avoid living life of sexual pain and sickness, Christians in Nigeria should understand and not relegate the right interpretation of Romans 1:26-27 in light of homosexuality.

VII. CONCLUSION

This work though not comprehensive, has shown beyond every reasonable doubt that Romans 1:26-27 is in no way supporting the practice of homosexuality but rather condemns it and also clearly show the consequences of indulging in such act. There is a real importance in following the sincere way of biblical interpretation to avoid misinterpreting and relegating the scripture. Surely, using the text as a support to homosexuality is alien to the text.

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⁹Roundy Bill. "STD Rates on the Rise" Blade News December 15, 2000

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