

The Argument of Paul to the Romans

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Preliminaries

For searchers of discussions on the New Perspective of Paul (NPP), this article won't address NPP. This article does address a non-traditional view of the contextual progression of Romans. Due to the newness of the presentation, much care must be used to test the content herein carefully with respect to scripture. Some ideas written in this article only as interesting thoughts and are a bit speculative. Most ideas and scripture references are germane to the understanding of Paul's argument.

Intro

Paul's writing to the Romans has well been recognized for the excellent handling of Old Testament scriptures seen through the knowledge and revelation of Christ Jesus. Now his writing ought to be seen also in the masterful debate skills utilized to reach to a distant hostile group of believers.

The artful technique of Paul receives strong consideration now in order to show the purpose of the writing (though the purpose is addressed in a different article). God's preparation of a man to this purpose ought to give glory to God. Thereafter, the attention should be focused back to the glorious message of Christ Jesus in the gospel.

Evidence for Proposed Argument of Paul

Many argumentative and psychological techniques were used by Paul.

1. Paul utilizes subtle manipulations of pronouns:
 - a) using "we" to soften up the places he could have said "you" -- "we" is less confrontational. For example Paul says, "Shall we sin that grace might increase?"
 - b) Rom 1:18-32 speaks of "them" then Rom 2:1-9 speaks of "you" --this is confrontational in the sense of a wakeup call
2. Paul uses questions. This would appear to be the Columbo tactic described by Greg Koukl of str.org
 - a) the questions are used instead of making accusations. For example, Paul in Rom 3:1 could have told the Roman Gentile believers to stop saying "the Jews are disadvantaged rogues of the earth for still following the law" and instead he asks, "What advantage do the Jews have?" The two approaches in direct comparison show that the latter approach to be more positive and acceptable, in the immediate issue as well as in the situation of the full argument.
 - b) the questions therefore disarm the audience. It reduces animosity. The argument may not be recognized until the audience has been converted to the new view.
 - c) the questions also placed Paul and the Romans on equal ground in the discussion. Paul didn't talking down to the Romans but invited them to review an issue.
3. Paul started off negatively in mention of the Jews at the beginning of the letter and then subtly increased the pleasant and positive talk about them.

Sequence:

- Rom 1 mentioned the first mantra of the form "to the Jew first and to the Greek" (vs 16)ⁱ

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- Rom 2 spoke judgmental words about only Jews who are hypocrites with respect to the Law.
 - Rom 3 brought up questions whether the Jews actually suffered a handicap
 - Rom 4 introduced Abraham as a forefather rather than a current Jew.
 - Rom 5-8 Paul introduced some positive aspects of the Law in order to promote indirect support for the Jew's situation
 - (and to discuss other problems among the Roman believers)
 - Rom 9 showed his own intense interest in the success of the Jews. Paul now feels like he can mention "Israel"
 - Rom 10 revealed that God faithfully was reaching Israel
 - Rom 11 spoke of God's fulfillment of His promise to Israel and spoke of the mercy extended all people.
 - Paul also presented the Jews as being the original olive tree, so that the Gentiles were grafted in later.
4. Paul maintained the topic of the Law of Moses as a central theme of the writing. At the same time Paul spoke of the strengths and glory of the law, he spoke also of the corrupt behavior of man's interaction with the Law. In chapter 2 Paul joined with the Roman Gentile believers in using the law as a tool of judgment against Jews but quickly shows the advantage of Jews as maintainers of the oracles of God. (Rom 3:2)
5. Paul created a mantra in the general form "to the Jew first, and to the Greek." The mantra plus other reconciliatory and equalizing passages showed Paul's attempt to draw the Gentiles into an acceptance of the Jews.

Equalizing passages:

- Rom 1:16 to the Jew first and to the Greek
- Rom 2:5-16 especially verses 10 to 12 showing "to the Jew first and to the Gentile" and "all have sinned"
- Rom 3:9-20 showed all were guilty
- Rom 4:11-12 indicated that Abraham was the father of believers not of the circumcision and of believers of the circumcision
- Rom 5:11,15,19 sin through Adam, salvation to many through Jesus
- Rom 8:14 "as many as are led by the Spirit are sons of God" [this is mildly inclusive of Jew and Gentile]
- Rom 9:23-24 provided the idea that God's glorious gifts were given to the Jew and the Gentile.
- Rom 10:11-12 demonstrated that there was no difference between Jew and Greek.
- Rom 11:11-36 represented the ultimate unification of Jew and Gentile within the Olive Tree analogy.

With so much equating of Jews to Gentiles, Paul must have been addressing a significant problem of division. The only related question would be whether this was an actual reality or just Paul's perception of division.

5. The argument introduces issues at strategic moments. [The article on *transitions* essentially addresses the strategic shifts in topics that Paul made.]
- a) The sermon of judgment against "them" (those who weren't Roman Gentile believers) at Rom 1:18-32 shifts to accusing the Roman believers in Rom 2:1-2
- b) The Gentile's accusations of Jews in Rom 3, which were inverted into questions being asked by Paul, follows accusations the Gentile believers made against Jews generally in Rom 2:17-24.
- c) Righteous was presented in Rom 3:24-26 to contrast to the issue of boasting among the Gentile believers in vs 27. and the topic of boasting was carried forth into Rom 4:1-4 (but also is implicit in most of chapter 4)

Now for details on Paul's shift of apparent audience through his careful use of pronouns.

Chapter 1 first spoke to "you" Romans, who are Gentiles and barbarians (vs 14).^{*1} Then in verse 18 speaks critically of an unnamed "them" and "those" in a manner that reads as self-righteous judgmental sermon of all other people. So the energy of discussion is directed against a group who isn't the audience at hand.ⁱⁱ

Chapter 2 transitions from the *sermon* about "them" into a rebuke of "you who judge." The "you" is the audience of Roman believers. Verse 17 changes to speak to those of "you" that name yourself a "Jew" which either is limited number of hypocritical Jews among them or is a rebuke of outside Jews in opposition to the Roman Gentile believers. Then verses 25 to 29 speak of "he" (third person pronoun) in the formation of a definition.

Chapter 3 then speaks to "You" or "we." Paul, in verse 1, is basically saying "You now asking what advantage the Jew has" or is saying "We might now ask what advantage the Jews has." A major shift has occurred from the apparent audience of Rom 2:17 ("You who are named among Jews") into the audience of Rom 3:1 since a Jew of that era would not think that Jews had a disadvantage. Also, verse 2 says "unto **them** were committed the oracles of God" showing that the audience is non-Jewish. Significantly, Paul doesn't say "unto us were committed ..." so as to include himself.ⁱⁱⁱ

The shift in pronouns should be apparent by now. It seems that people today and in the past have read this in a manner that accepts these apparent changes in audience without question. This is other people's mail that was kept for posterity who today adds a bias and has a disassociation from the experience of those to whom the letter was written.

In reality the bias actually has little significance compared effects of the intentional shift of audience Paul actually did as part of his manner to persuade. So, looking at the letter as a letter to Gentile believers in Rome, the shift of audience was a technique to persuade the Gentile believers; Under this mode of investigation, the change of audience becomes a tool to influence these believers.^{iv}

Chapter 4 starts off speaking of Abraham as "our" forefather. And based on the audience Paul speaks of himself and the Roman believers. At verse 4 the discussion shifts a little to talk about a general "him" in the format of a definition. Verses 9 and 10 then imply Paul asking "You" Roman Gentile believers. The chapter basically is written in a typical manner showing Abraham as an example to be followed. The last two verses, 24-25, then have Paul speaks of "us" and "our" so as to include Paul as being among the Romans. This would be a technique for being for inclusive, discussing ideas as one family.

Chapter 5 starts the first 11 verses with Paul speaking of "we" again in the personal family style discussion. Then he goes into a normal historical approach about Adam and Jesus

Chapter 6 again goes into the personal inclusive family style discussion saying "we now should think about the issue whether we should be sinning that grace may abound." Verse 11 then speaks of "You" (plural) showing that Paul now gave instructions to the Romans.

Chapter 7 shows that Paul continues speaking to brethren. And verification comes in verse 1 that the audience isn't particularly Jewish, cause Jews would definitely know the Law. Note that some Gentiles would know the Law since they became curious as believers. Verse 4 specifically speaks to a "You" and then shifts to "we" after giving the Roman believers some specific instruction. It is as if Paul says that if "you" do this then you will be part of "us." Paul then finishes chapter 7 speaking of a struggle in speaking of his own life.

From what has just been investigated, the pronoun changes in chapters 4 to 7 are more typical of a general argument. Though, some tactical shifts were done by changing between "you" and "we" so that Paul can minimize the portions of discussion that give instructions specifically and somewhat authoritatively to the Romans.

Chapter 8 interestingly speaks of "them" by saying there is "no condemnation to them who walk ... according to the Spirit." This would likely be that Paul didn't want all the Romans to think they were true believers -- at least until they started to act like believers. Then in verse 9 Paul starts to include people conditionally. And again Paul uses "we" on the last half on chapter 8 since Paul wants to encourage the whole group of people.

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Chapter 9 does a radical shift with Paul's mention of "I" and "my brethren." This again shows the audience hasn't been Jewish. Verse 1 would be saying "I, Paul, say the truth in Christ to you Roman Gentile believers..."

Chapters 10 and 11 continues speaking mostly of Paul's "I" and Israel as "they"

So, the investigation involved tedious analysis of pronouns and audience but revealed some interesting aspects of Paul's argument and should be proof identifying the specific audience to whom Paul spoke.

Concluding observations

The analysis lends credence to the idea that Paul had specific goals and a specific structure in his writing. The identification of argumentative techniques along with a patterns of presentation show that persuasion was intended rather than just teaching. Yet Paul likely intended also to teach these doctrines so that the Roman believers would have the knowledge to equip them to make the right decisions.

Looking at Paul's mentality, he seemed to attempt clever arguments to persuade the Roman believers into reading the letter and into changing their behavior. Historically it seems that the believers didn't change in accord with Paul's desire. Paul's cleverness did not achieve some measure of success in the gap left by the Holy Spirit. Yet, God's perfect will still was being accomplished and the true believers were saved; And they likely were effectively strengthened by Paul's letter. The additional lesson learned here is that believers must do what is logical and reasonable while laying the ultimate burden back onto Jesus who is the Savior.

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i) An additional observation is that if the Gentile believers were antagonistic against the Jews, verse 16 would have easily been interpreted by them to mean that the gospel is the power unto salvation to the Jews first, who rejected the gospel, which is now to only for the Greek.

ii) The audience is of believers as described in another article. There possibly were Jews among those addressed in the letter but it would have to be primarily Roman Gentile believers especially if Paul is speaking of his ministry, now, as being to the Greeks and barbarians.

iii) Additional pronouns don't show much on the argument. Rom 3:2 speaks of Jews as "them" which is normal speech except that Paul is a Jew and could have said "us." In Rom 3:7 Paul speaks of himself using a natural flow of discussion. Paul wrote of people saying "Let us do evil" (Rom 3:8) which could refer to Paul and his entourage, but more likely is speaking of Paul and the Romans. There doesn't tend to be another "we" that Paul refers to in the first 11 chapters of Romans. Further investigation: Does Rom 1:5 actually imply or say "we" in the Greek?

iv) The shift in audience actually appears to be the reason why some people have seen the letter to the Romans as an evangelistic tract. It seems in chapter 1 he is preaching to unsaved Roman Gentiles. Chapter 2 seems like a message to unsaved Jews. Chapter 3 seems like simple doctrinal teaching to Roman Gentile believers. The only problem with such sectioning of the letter is that Paul essentially wrote letters to correct Gentile believers not to announce evangelism meetings.