

071104 Dialectical Argumentation: Paul's Appeal 22/45 November 4, 2007GG Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Dialectical Argumentation: Paul's Appeal

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Ro 10:4-11)

The study of the various Biblical literary genres is highly productive to the serious Bible student. For example, Hebrew poetry (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and portions of other Old Testament books are written in poetic form. In our English culture we measure the number of syllables on each line and develop one or more of various patterns named after the syllable pattern (Few among us can forget our early exposure to "iambic pentameter," for example). We also follow a system of rhyming sounds at the end of each line (book, look, hook, for example). In Hebrew poetry the rhyming concept appears in the repetition of ideas, not in sounds that end each line. Thus you frequently read in the Psalms the repetition of the same idea in various forms, one following close upon the other. The richness of this idea appears in its most instructive and beautiful form, for example, in the twenty-third Psalm.

One could almost develop the idea that Paul's writings in the New Testament form their own unique literary genre. Of the handful of writers of the New Testament letters, Paul was the only one among them to have received an advanced formal education in Tarsus, one of the leading "ivy league" seats of learning before he moved to Jerusalem where he appears to have been studying to eventually join the San Hedrin council, the leading religious institution among first century Judaism. The other New Testament writers were less formally educated and thus wrote in something of a different literary style.

Paul's classical studies appear in various specific forms throughout his writings. For example, only someone who had such an educational background would have been familiar with two ancient and respected Greek poet-philosophers from more than three hundred years earlier, the source of his two quotes in [Ac 17](#). "...For we are also his offspring," ([Ac 17:28](#)). The Greek poet-philosopher Cleanthes (331-233 BC) wrote these words in a poem entitled "Ode to Zeus." Paul quoted the line and applied it to God, not to Zeus. In addition, and more relevant to Paul's personal letters in the New Testament, is the fact that Paul was trained and skilled in the secular discipline of dialectical rhetoric. This term describes a particular form of reasoning that was first discussed by Plato. It was more fully developed by Aristotle who sought to combine rhetorical style with dialectic logic. Aristotle applied the methods and logic of dialectic reasoning such as one-to-one discourse and logical chains of argument in combination with rhetorical style to develop a rhetorical method of ethical persuasion that appealed to reason to gain agreement and refute the methods of trickery and fallacy employed by sophistry.¹⁰⁶ In dialectical argumentation the writer or speaker often engages in conversations with a hypothetical person who holds to different views than those expressed by the writer. This style is quite useful when the writer's hypothetical opponent holds to precisely the same ideas as some of the writer's actual recipients or readers. The objective in dialectical reasoning is to be so accurate, thorough, and fair in

dealing with that person's ideas that he/she would congratulate you for your insight into their ideas. The ultimate objective in dialectical argumentation is to win the person, not the argument. Once the dialectical writer so identified his hypothetical conversant's ideas he would analyze them, compare them with his own ideas, and attempt to prove that his ideas were superior. Paul's writings frequently exhibit this literary device. We have seen it several times already in Romans. It appears clearly in the ninth chapter where he introduces objections to his teachings on election and interacts with them.

We shall see this same literary device in the tenth chapter. Here Paul continues his hypothetical, but quite relevant, dialogue with the same dialectical "other person" with whom he interacted in the ninth chapter. In the tenth chapter he will refine the points of discussion from election to the ethical consequences of the two theological ideas that he raised in the ninth chapter. Ideas have consequences, so we should not be surprised by the thought that our beliefs about God impose a forceful impact on how we think, how we live, and how we treat other people. We could develop these ideas in our language culture by the use of allegorical names for each of the two ideas that Paul examines, similar in literary form to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Here we might refer to the idea, "the righteousness of faith," as "Mr. Faith," and we could refer to the opposing legalistic view that sought to gain favor with God by an external—and errant—use of the Law of Moses as "Mr. Legalist." Rather than referring to this errant idea as "Mr. Law," I choose "Mr. Legalist," for God's Law, given to Moses, was holy and good when used as God intended, but He did not give it to become the surrogate god to His people, but rather as an instructive tutor—"schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" ([Ga 3:24](#)). From this passage we learn that a correct use of the Mosaic Law actually enhances our faith; it was never intended to become the antithesis of faith as the people who rejected Paul's teaching depicted it to be.

Albert Barnes, a respected Reformed commentator, addresses this dialectical argumentation later in this chapter.

Verse 14. *How then shall they call*, etc. The apostle here adverts to an objection which might be urged to his argument.¹⁰⁷

The respected Christian historian Philip Schaff makes the following observation regarding the Apostle Paul's writing style.

Paul's style is manly, bold, heroic, aggressive, and warlike; yet at times tender, delicate, gentle, and winning. It is involved, irregular, and rugged, but always forcible and expressive, and not seldom rises to more than poetic beauty, as in the triumphant paean at the end of the eighth chapter of Romans, and in the ode on love ([1Co 13](#)). His intense earnestness and overflowing fulness of ideas break through the ordinary rules of grammar. His logic is set on fire. He abounds in skilful arguments, bold antitheses, impetuous assaults, abrupt transitions, sudden turns, zigzag flashes, startling questions and exclamations. He is dialectical and argumentative; he likes logical particles, paradoxical phrases, and plays on words. He reasons from Scripture, from premises, from conclusions; he drives the opponent to the wall without mercy and reduces him *ad absurdum*, but without ever indulging in personalities.¹⁰⁸

Notice especially Schaff's point that Paul will push errant ideas to the point of their logical absurdity, though he avoids attacking people or "...indulging in personalities." We would do well to follow Paul's example in this point.

Here again we find more from Schaff regarding Paul's writings.

Paul is the pioneer of Christian theology. He alone among the apostles had received a learned rabbinical education and was skilled in logical and dialectical argument. But his logic is vitalized and set on fire. His theology springs from his heart as well as from his brain; it is the result of his conversion, and all aglow with the love of Christ.¹⁰⁹

As with Schaff's first description of Paul, we would do well to keep our brains and our hearts, our intelligence and logical reasoning and our emotions, connected as we study the Bible and present our beliefs to others.

The Society of Biblical Literature periodically deals with Paul's unique style of writing. Below I have quoted at length from the Society's publication, an article that specifically examines Paul's literary style in the tenth chapter of Romans.

Reading vv. 6–8 more closely, we can see that personified *Dikaiosune* speaks directly to the individual to deliver enlightenment: “Don't say in your heart” (see Greek text (v. 6). The worries from [De 30:12-14](#) continue to resound and to need clarification in the present vocabulary of the community. Thus, “who will climb up to the sky?” (see Greek text) [v. 6]) is immediately interpreted by “which is to say, to bring Christ down” (see Greek text [v. 6]). And “who will plunge into the abyss?” (see Greek text [v. 7]) receives a further note, “which is, to bring Christ back from the dead” (see Greek text [v. 7]). Paul then resumes the voice of *Dikaiosune* in asking “what does she say [mean] (see Greek text [v. 8]) by “Near you is the word—in your mouth—in your heart” (see Greek text [v. 8]). To which a response is given that echoes the very message of Paul: “that is, the word of trust which we announce”(see Greek text [v. 8]).

Verse 9 continues to work upon what Paul rhetorically anticipates to be the experiential basis of his audience.

(9) Because if you *confess with your mouth* “JESUS IS LORD!” and trust in your heart that “God raised him from the dead,” you will be all right.

Notice the author's personal translation above. He translates “saved” in Verse Nine as “...you will be all right.” Amen!

Both “Jesus is Lord” (?????? ??????) and “God raised him from the dead” (??? ?????? ?????? ??????? ?? ??????) may well come from common liturgical language (note ??????????; cf. [Joh 9:22](#)). If so, then Paul not only would be appealing to their own experience but would be demonstrating inductively that *Dikaiosune* herself is speaking from the midst of their own situation, that is, from their experience of a trusting relationship with God. Thus, we are not simply dealing with a recitation of credal formulae. Rather, the alternating utterances on the lips of Paul and of the community would manifest the soundness of genuine inner relationship (*Dikaiosune*). In an oral situation people are placed in the buzz of things. By writing these lines for delivery, Paul hopes that his audience would find themselves in the midst of this acoustic field. He anticipates that they would discover that they are part of what is going on and what is going on is this genuine relationship named *Dikaiosune*. The true sound (Christ, cf. vv. 4, 6, 7, 9) reveals the interior of tradition (?????). In fact, from Paul's perspective, once this point is *felt*, then the community can recognize that everything and everyone can resound with this sense. Even the written tradition can be overheard proclaiming this:

(10) trusting in one's heart results in genuine relationship

and *confessing with one's mouth* brings well-being.

(11) For the *written* tradition says: “Everyone who trusts in him will not be shamed.”¹¹⁰

I have provided these lengthy quotes at this point in our study of the tenth chapter of Romans to provide you with significant historical and theological evidence to confront the common contemporary view that interprets Paul's theology in the tenth chapter of Romans as effectively contradicting his theology in the ninth chapter. If, as we believe, Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we cannot logically believe that he would contradict himself from one chapter to the next. Nor can we impose a personal interpretation that creates such a contradiction and then illogically dismiss it as

Spurgeon (regarding his idea of God's sovereignty and man's free will) and many contemporary Bible teachers do by "...giving up..." our minds to understand the apparent contradiction. If God faithfully and honestly communicated His truth to us in Scripture, He did not inject real contradictions in Scripture. Thus, if our interpretations of Scripture conclude with such logical or theological contradictions, we must re-examine our interpretations and consciously follow Scripture (rather than attempting to lead it) to its consistent, harmonious, and non-contradictory teachings.

In the above lengthy quote from the Society of Biblical Literature, along with Barnes' reference, we see, what is to most contemporary Bible students and teachers alike, a surprising point. Rather than seeing in the tenth chapter of Romans a simple monologue from Paul, we discover a rather intense debate between Paul and his dialectical—and quite real—critics with whom he disagrees. We shall spend significant time with Paul and his critics in the verses that follow.