

The Rhetoric of Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans often is examined with an interest in how the apostle chooses to make his points.

- He uses testimony lists of biblical citations, in which a string of verses are quoted in rapid succession (e.g., 3:10–18 quotes Ps. 14:1–3; Ps. 53:1–2; Ps. 5:9; Ps. 140:3; Ps. 10:7; Isa. 59:7–8; Ps. 36:1).
- He employs creative techniques of biblical interpretation (e.g., arguing in 4:9–12 that, since Abraham had not been circumcised when he first trusted in God, we must conclude that uncircumcised gentiles may be put right with God through faith).
- He draws on key concepts from Stoic philosophy, including his appeal to conscience (2:15) and to “natural law” (1:26).
- He employs a rhetorical style of argument known as “diatribe,” responding to questions posed by an imaginary dialogue partner (e.g., 3:1; 6:1).
- He offers analogies from daily life to explain theological points (e.g., grafting a branch from a wild olive tree onto the root of a cultivated tree = incorporating gentiles into the people of God rooted in the history of Israel).