Chapter 9

Paul's Ethic of Nonretaliation and Peace

Paul often faced the realities of conflict, abuse, and enmity, both within his communities and in relation to outsiders hostile to him and his fellow Messiah-loyalists. Such realities were so significant that references to proper behaviour among Jesus-loyalists in response to injury or persecution appear in nearly all his extant letters and in a variety of genres.

First, in hortatory (paraenetic) contexts we find explicit exhortations on this topic. Within the unit of Romans 12:9-21 we find the longest treatment of this theme, which addresses dynamics both within the community and (especially) in relation to hostile opponents:

> Love [is] non-pretentious;[1] abhorring the evil, clinging to the good. (v. 9)
> Bless those who persecute [you];[2] bless and do not curse. (v. 14)
> Repaying no one evil for evil, but taking forethought for noble conduct in the sight of all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, living peaceably with all people. Not avenging yourselves, beloved, but leave room for wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I myself will repay, says the Lord."
> But, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by doing so you will heap coals of fire upon his head."
> Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.
> (vv. 17-21)

The exhortation of 1 Thessalonians 5:13b-15 is similarly addressed initially to internal conflict but is extended to refer to relations with all people, including the persecutors of the community (1:6-7; 2:14-16; 3:1-5):

> Be at peace among yourselves.
> And we exhort you, . . . admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted,
> hold onto the weak, be long-tempered[3] toward all.
> See that nobody repays evil for evil,
> but always pursue good toward one another and toward all.

In Philippians 4:5 Paul also exhorts nonretaliatory conduct in relation to all persons. The context (1:27-30) makes it clear that Paul especially means to include adversaries of the community:

> Let your clemency be known to all people. The Lord is at hand.

Colossians 3:12-15a addresses relations within the assembly:

> Put on, then, . . . merciful compassion, kindness, low-mindedness, meekness, long-temper, enduring one another and showing favour/grace to one another if someone has a complaint against another, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive.
> And upon all of these put on love, which is the bond of perfection.
> And let the peace of Christ be the arbiter among your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

Second, nonretaliatory themes appear in catalogues of hardships describing Paul's behavioural credentials as an apostle. First Corinthians 4:12-13a describes Paul's response to persecutors:

> When reviled we bless, when persecuted we endure, when slandered we conciliate.

In the catalogue of 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul commends his "great endurance" (*hypomonē pollē*) in afflictions (2 Cor 6:4), his "long-temper" (*makrothymia*), and his "genuine love" (*agapē anypokritos*, 2 Cor 6:6).

Third, in the virtue and vice lists of Galatians 5:16-24, the vices of enmity, strife, and jealousy (*echthrai*, *eris*, *zēlos*, Gal 5:20) are countered by the virtues of love, peace, and long-temper (*agapē*, *eirēnē*, *makrothymia*, Gal 5:22).

Fourth, the nonretaliatory acceptance of abuse is promoted in the ad hoc exhortation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. Paul exhorts his readers not to take their disputes to the pagan courts but either to find a Messiah-loyalist mediator or, better, to endure injustice instead of pursuing judicial vindication:

> Actually, it is already a defeat for you that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? (1 Cor 6:7)

Fifth, the hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13, which in its context addresses relations within the community of loyalists, includes the following nonretaliatory themes:

> Love is forbearing. . . . (13:4)
> It does not reckon evil. . . . (13:5)
> It bears all things. . . , endures all things. (13:7)

Finally, in the fool's speech of 2 Corinthians 11:1-12:13, Paul parodies the ideal conduct of slaves in response to abuse:

> You endure it if someone enslaves you, if someone devours you, if someone takes advantage of you, if someone acts presumptuously, if someone strikes you in the face. (2 Cor 11:20)

While ironically ridiculing the community for taking upon themselves a servile position in relation to the enslaving false teachers, Paul implies that endurance is the proper behaviour of a slave in the context of abuse (cf. *kalōs anechesthe*, 2 Cor 11:4; *hēdeōs anechesthe*, 2 Cor 11:19). What Paul derides is their acceptance of a servile position in relation to the false teachers. Colossians 3:22-25 expresses the same ideal for slaves, based on deferring justice to God:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything. . . For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong committed, and there is no partiality. (Col 3:22a, 25)[4]

To summarize, we find the following themes included in the field of proper responses to injury or persecution. Passive responses include:

1. "Not repaying evil for evil" (*mē apodidonai kakon anti kakou*, 1 Thess 5:15a; Rom 12:17a)
2. "Not taking vengeance for oneself" (*mē heautous ekdikountes*, Rom 12:19a)
3. "Not cursing" (*mē katarēsthai*, Rom 12:14)

4. "Clemency" and "long-temper" (*epieikes*, Phil 4:5; *makrothymia*, 1 Thess 5:14; 1 Cor 13:4; Gal 5:22; 2 Cor 6:6)

5. "Endurance" (*anechesthai*, lit. "holding up, holding back,"[5] 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 11:20; cf. Col 3:13; 2 Thess 1:4; *hypomenein*, Rom 12:12; 2 Cor 6:4; 1 Cor 13:7; cf. Rom 5:3-4; 2 Cor 1:6)

6. "Not litigating" (1 Cor 6:1-8)

7. "Not reckoning evil" (*mē logizesthai*, 1 Cor 13:5; cf. 2 Cor 5:19)

Active responses include:

8. "Responding with good/kind deeds" (1 Thess 5:15b; Rom 12:17b, 20-21)

9. "Blessing" (*eulogein*, Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12)

10. "Conciliating" (*parakalein*, 1 Cor 4:13)[6]

11. "Being at peace" (*eirēneuein*, 1 Thess 5:13; Rom 12:18; cf. Gal 5:20, 22)[7]

12. "Showing favour/grace" (*charizesthai*, 2 Cor 2:7-10; Col 3:13)[8]

13. "Loving" (1 Cor 13:47; cf. 2 Cor 6:6; Rom 12:9; 1 Thess 3:12)

The purpose of this essay is to identify the coherence fundamental to these exhortations and themes, particularly as regards their various explications, implicit or explicit warrants, motivations/goals, and social applications. For the sake of this essay, we will term this coherence Paul's "ethic of nonretaliation and peace."[9] Such a treatment of these exhortations and themes is necessary, since the terminology of "vengeance" ("vindication") or "retaliation" in antiquity has multiple lexical meanings[10] and since nearly identical formulations on the topic of nonretaliation in antiquity can range so markedly in social setting, meaning, and function as to be hardly comparable.[11] We must, then, necessarily ask the following questions. (1) What kind of "vengeance" does Paul prohibit in different cases? (2) Do the exhortations apply equally to different types of abuse and abusers? Are the abusers viewed as friends, fellow assembly members, personal adversaries, or as sinners and the enemies of God? Is it significant that in the previous survey of texts "love" and "forgiving" are not explicitly exhorted in relation to hostile outsiders (cf. Matt 5:44)? (3) What motivations or warrants characterize or ground the exhortations, and do they differ in accordance with different social settings? What hopes are expressed as to the eventual fate of the opponents: their reconciliation with the injured party, or their punishment or demise? If the latter, how is the agency of divine vengeance anticipated?

We will investigate these issues by focusing on Romans 12:14-21, since this is Paul's most extensive treatment on the proper response to injury and conflict and since this text is the subject of considerable

scholarly debate. But in order to place the discussion in the context of Paul's thought as a whole, particularly since Paul's ethical vision is fundamentally related to his redemptive vision, we will begin with a summary of Paul's vision of cosmic peace.

Paul's Vision of Cosmic Peace

At the core of Paul's gospel is his vision of cosmic restoration—the eschatological redemption of the entire created order. This coming order of peace and righteousness (a) will be fully realized by the final triumph of God over the hostile and destructive powers of this age,[12] which includes judgment and wrath against all unrighteousness and opposition to God,[13] (b) has been proleptically inaugurated by God in Christ through the resurrection, and (c) is realized provisionally in the life of the loyal believer and the community where Messiah already reigns as Lord.[14]

Peace, along with justice, is one of the essential characteristics of this coming order of salvation. While the language of peace in Paul sometimes refers to eschatological salvation as a whole,[15] terms such as "the reconciliation of the cosmos/all things"[16] and "the subjection of all things" to Christ and God[17] also express the vision of cosmic peace. The numerous texts in which Paul characterizes God as "the God of peace"[18] also indicate that "peace" is a central attribute of God's salvation.

For Paul, then, peace refers fundamentally to the eschatological salvation of the whole person, all humanity,[19] and the entire universe. It refers to the normal state of all things—the order of God's creative and redeeming action versus the disorder of the chaotic powers of Satan.[20]

The many other specific uses of peace in Paul appear to be founded on this basic notion: peace with God,[21] peace of soul (Rom 15:13), peace as a fruit of the Spirit in the believer (Gal 5:22), peace among people, especially in the church,[22] and peace as divinely wrought well-being and wholeness.[23]

Against the backdrop of this vision of cosmic peace, then, we proceed to discuss Paul's ethic of nonretaliation and peace, as expressed especially in Romans 12:14-21.

The Debate Regarding Romans 12:14-21

Structurally, the exhortations on responding to abuse, hostility, and injustice in Romans 12:14-21 consist of a series of paired contrasts, comprised of negative prohibitions balanced by positive prescriptions:

Bless persecutors/Do not curse. (12:14)

Do not retaliate/Maintain noble conduct and live in peace. (12:17-18)

Do not avenge for yourselves/Give food and drink to the enemy. (12:19-20)
Do not be conquered by evil/Conquer evil with good. (12:21)

The exhortations of verses 19 and 20 are grounded by parallel motivational clauses:

for God will avenge/
for doing good will heap coals of fire upon the opponent's head.

One of the critical issues of scholarly debate on this text focuses on the character and motivational structure of the exhortation. Is Paul's exhortation best characterized as an ethic of nonretaliation understood as an apocalyptic restraint in deference to God's impending wrath against persecutors or as an ethic of love aimed at reconciliation with opponents? Are kind deeds to adversaries of the assembly (vv. 20-21) to be interpreted as contributing to the repentance and reconciliation of opponents, or as the means to appease the community's abusers while contributing to the punishment stored against them in the day of wrath?

Approaches to this question can be grouped into three types, despite variations in regard to details. These can be termed the "standard," "apocalyptic," and "mediating" approaches.[24]

The standard interpretation holds that Romans 12:14-21 expresses an ethic of "love" (12:9) toward one's enemies, the goal of which is the conversion and reconciliation of the opponent. Unconditional love toward the other is not only the content of behaviour enjoined but also its grounding motivation. On this interpretation, "heaping coals of fire" in verse 20c refers either (1) to the pangs of shame and remorse, which either lead to conversion and reconciliation or leave the opponent with a bad conscience or (2) to the simple resolve of the adversary to pursue reconciliation. Verse 21b ("but conquer evil with good," *alla nika en tō agathō to kakon*) is thus taken as a reference to the power of love to influence evil and to effect conversion and reconciliation. The theme of leaving wrath and vengeance in God's hands (v. 19bc), which is often downplayed, means that Christians ought not to be occupied in any way with God's vengeance and the last judgment. The call is simply to trust in God's sovereignty or to hope that God's educative wrath will lead adversaries to repentance.

By contrast, the apocalyptic interpretation, as articulated especially by Krister Stendahl,[25] reads this text in the context of persecution. Nonretaliation and good deeds are simply the right responses in times of trouble, when enmity is inevitable and insurmountable. "Heaping coals of fire" is understood as a reference to eschatological judgment, which the enemies of the assembly are storing up against themselves. Good deeds

are not to be understood as a type of love and not intended necessarily to have any reconciling effect; rather, they actually contribute to the culpability of the enemies on the day of wrath. Nonretaliation, then, is essentially an apocalyptic restraint, motivated primarily out of deference to God's judgment. It is not only the conviction that God is the rightful arbiter of justice but also the conviction of the imminent realization of the age to come which motivates or permits nonretaliation.[26] Verse 21b ("but conquer evil with good") does not refer to the power of love to influence evil but to the assured eschatological victory over evil; doing good while deferring to God is the way ultimately to defeat evil. Some scholars see here a distinct desire for revenge against opponents. But others focus rather on the notion of deferment as primarily offering an eschatological hope and a theodicy of evil.

A mediating position, as articulated recently by John Piper, stands between the standard and apocalyptic interpretations.[27] With the apocalyptic interpretation, Piper argues that both verse 19c and verse 20c refer to eschatological judgment. "Heaping up coals of fire" is essentially the same as "storing up wrath" against impenitent unbelievers (Rom 2:4-5). Nevertheless Piper still seeks to understand the exhortation as a "love command." First, the call to bless the persecutor in Romans 12:14 governs the thought of the entire passage and rules out the possibility that the exhortation entails any desire for one's neighbours's destruction; there is no revenge motif here. Second, verse 20 implies the condition of *persistent* disobedience and enmity in the face of good deeds. Third, Piper argues that "enemy love" *requires* complete confidence in the future wrath against the enemies of the Messianic assembly:

> The two *gar* ["for"] clauses (Rom 12:19c, 20c) are intended to give assurance that God is not unrighteous: "God will render to every man according to his works" (Rom 2:6). Romans 12:20c does not present the conscious aim of the believer, but states the framework of justice in which enemy love becomes possible and good—a framework founded on God's own righteousness (Rom 2:4, 5). To be aware of this framework will motivate him to genuine enemy love just as much as God's consciousness of his own righteousness moves him to kindness.[28]

Piper, then, differs from the "apocalyptic" interpretation and sides with the standard interpretation in the following ways. (1) Paul's exhortation is indeed a command of enemy love in content and motivation. (2) The exhortation does not forgo hope for the enemy's conversion and reconciliation. (3) The motivation of deferring to God's righteous

judgment "is subordinate to, but not inconsistent with, the overarching ground of enemy love which is expressed in Romans 12:1—'the mercies of God.'"

In what follows, then, we will clarify the character of Paul's ethic of nonretaliation in Romans 12:14-21 by observing the implications of the literary context for interpreting this text and then by discussing the social setting and application of the exhortation, the substantive meaning of the individual exhortations, and the warrants for the exhortation.

Implications of the Literary Context of Romans 12:14, 17-21

When the nonretaliatory exhortations of Romans 12:14, 17-21 are seen within the literary context of the two larger units of which it is a part (Rom 12:9-21; 12:1–13:14), two things become apparent: the exhortation (1) is related to the theme of love and (2) is set within the framework of the apocalyptic struggle and choice between the two aeons, the cosmic powers of good and evil. In contrast to Romans 14:1–15:13, a sustained argument on a specific topic, Romans 12:1–13:14 is comprised of a series of independent thematic units. While the unit seems to be without logical structure or thematic development, 12:1–13:14 is tied together by catchwords, by recurring themes, and by two units (12:1-2; 13:11-14) which bracket the entire exhortation and place it in the context of the conflict and choice between two aeons (the present age and the age to come).

Romans 12:9-21 can be distinguished as a unit by thematic inclusion (good/evil, vv. 9bc, 21), by the use of terse parallel statements, including doublets (vv. 10-13) and paired contrasts (vv. 9bc, 14-21), and using imperatival participles, adjectives, and infinitives. Three recurring topics within the unit are harmonious relations within the community, without competitive rivalry and social hierarchy (vv. 10, 13, 15-16), steadfastness in devotion and piety (vv. 11-12), and relations with abusers (vv. 14, 17-21). Some exhortations are coordinated by a similar presumed occasion: adversity and suffering (vv. 14-15). "Regard for the other" in general, whether within or outside the community, seems to be the most persistent theme (vv. 9a-10, 13-21). Both verse 9a ("love [is] non-pretentious," *hē agapē anypokritos*) and verse 9bc ("abhoring the evil, clinging to the good") function to introduce the unit, formally and thematically.[29]

Verse 9a functions partially as a bridge between 12:3-8 and 12:9-21, two units that cannot be sharply separated. Nevertheless, verse 9a also functions as a heading for 12:9-21. (1) While love cannot account for all the contents of 12:9-21 (cf. 12:9bc, 11-12), a good portion of

12:9-21 deals with the topic of harmonious relations among all people, which naturally falls under the category of love. (2) While "love" in Paul and in the present context is articulated especially in terms of relations within the Christian community (12:10; 13:8-10), 1 Thessalonians 3:12 confirms that, for Paul, love also extends to outsiders:

> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all (*eis allēlous kai eis pantas)*.

The fact that Paul's only other use of the phrase "toward one another and toward all" (*eis allēlous kai eis pantas*) clarifies the horizon of nonretaliation and goodness later in 1 Thess 5:15 suggests that nonretaliation and goodness conform to the category of love. (3) In 2 Corinthians 6:6, the only other occurrence of this phrase in Paul, "non-pretentious love" (*agapē anypokritos*) is a key theme alongside other key virtues, expressing the commendable character of Paul's ministry. While *agapē anypokritos* is not explicitly related to nonretaliatory conduct in this passage (2 Cor 6:3-10), the fact that Paul's catalogue of virtues arises in the context of persecution (2 Cor 6:4-5) and includes "forbearance" and "long-temper" (*en hypomonē pollē*, *en makrothymia*, 2 Cor 6:4, 6) suggests that *agapē anypokritos* includes the nonretaliatory conduct that he describes. (4) Paul's panegyric to love in 1 Corinthians 13 includes nonretaliatory themes (13:4, 5, 7), and love is one of the key "weapons" for battle with evil (1 Thess 5:8). (5) The parallel correlation of the commands to "love neighbour" and to desist from taking vengeance in Leviticus 19:18, a text cited in Romans 12:18 and in 13:8-10, suggests that Paul understands nonretaliation is to be closely aligned with the fundamental directive of love. In Paul's vocabulary, then, *agapē anypokritos* is appropriate as a heading for proper human conduct in general and for nonretaliatory conduct in particular (Rom 12:14, 17-21).

Romans 12:9bc also functions as an introductory heading for 12:9-21. It has a general character, it introduces the forms of the imperatival participle and the paired contrast, and with verse 21 encloses the unit:

> Abhoring the evil (*to ponēron*), clinging to the good (*tō agathō*). (12:9bc)
> Do not be conquered by evil (*tou kakou*), but conquer evil with good (*tō agathō*). (12:21)

Moreover, the theme of the struggle between good and evil here is a component of the theme that encloses and grounds the entire segment of Romans 12:1–13:14, the apocalyptic conflict and choice between the two aeons (12:1-2; 13:11-14). Accordingly, the exhortations of 12:14, 17-21

are also grounded in "the mercies of God" (12:1), which mark the victory of the coming age over the present age through Christ (cf. 5:1-11; 8:31-39). The apocalyptic framework of the choice between good and evil is expressed also at the close of the letter:

> For I wish that you be wise as to the good, but innocent as to the evil;
> and then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
> (16: 19b-20a)

The literary context of Romans 12:14 and 12:17-21, then, indicates that the exhortation must be interpreted both within the context of the theme of love and within the context of the apocalyptic conflict between the aeons of good and evil.

The Social Setting and Application of Romans 12:14-21

A judgment regarding the social setting and application of the exhortations in Romans 12:14, 17-21 is also critical for their interpretation. It is necessary, first, to clarify the nature of the abuse to which these verses are addressed.

The following factors indicate that Romans 12:14, 17-21 is addressed to relations especially with outsiders, particularly those hostile to the community.[30] (1) Verse 14 is directed specifically to the situation of persecution. *Diōkein* in the sense of "persecute" elsewhere in Paul and the New Testament refers only to hostility from outsiders, never from insiders.[31] (2) In verses 17-21, which pick up the theme of verse 14, the exhortation is emphatically directed to relations with "all humans" (*enōpion pantōn anthrōpōn*, v. 17b; *meta pantōn anthrōpōn*, v. 18; cf. Phil 4:5), not the more ambiguous "all" (1 Thess 3:12; 5:15). While Paul sometimes uses "all" to refer to those within the community (though not in 1 Thess 3:12; 5:15), his use of phrases with "all humans" (or simply the term "humans") is never limited only to those within the assembly.[32] Moreover, verse 18b, "be at peace with all people," is set in direct contrast to the internal focus of verse 18a, "if possible, so far as it depends on you" (*ei dynaton to ex hymōn*). The implication is that the conflict with outsiders is so serious that it may not be resolved. (3) The battle imagery of verse 21 implies serious conflict, particularly the apocalyptic conflict between the two ages. Besides picking up the theme of the struggle between good and evil in 12:1-2, 12:9, and 13:11-14, the verse also continues the theme of apocalyptic conflict and victory against powers

hostile to the assembly in 8:31-39. (4) The grounding theme of deferring vengeance to God is especially appropriate for nonretaliatory conduct in relation to outsiders. As we shall see, in Paul's view, adherents to Messiah must make justice a reality in their own midst but leave the judgment of outsiders to God (1 Cor 5:9-13). (5) In the broader context of Romans, Paul is distinctly preoccupied with the problem of hostility, persecution, and thus suffering from those outside the assembly (Rom 8:31-39; cf. 8:17-28; 5:1-5). Finally (6) the exhortation to nonretaliation and good deeds in relation to hostile outsiders (Rom 12:14, 17-21) complements the exhortation to submission in relation to ruling authorities (Rom 13:1-7). The two passages are linked thematically, both addressing the question of responding to and minimizing conflict with the surrounding worId. Indeed, Romans 13:1-7 cannot be properly comprehended without appreciating the immediately prior exhortation in 12:17-21.[33]

The question that now emerges is whether or not the exhortations in Romans 12:14, 17-21 presuppose a particular setting, either one in Paul's experience or one in Rome to which the exhortation is addressed.

Paul is apparently preoccupied with the problem of suffering and persecution when writing Romans. This is indicated by the centrality of the themes of persecution, suffering, endurance, and the eschatological victory over evil earlier in the letter. This topic is introduced in Romans 5:1-11. By virtue of God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ, Jesus-loyalists can "boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God" (5:2). But,

> more than that, we boast in our sufferings (*thlipsesin*), knowing that suffering produces endurance (*hē thipsis hypomonēn katergazetai*), and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (5:3-5)

It is not until Romans 8:17-39, however, that Paul can elaborate on these themes. Indeed, Romans 8:17-39 demonstrates that suffering and persecution are critical issues in both Paul's life and thought.[34]

Romans 8:17-39 explicates the necessary but temporary and surmountable experience of suffering on the road to glory. The climax comes in 8:31-39, the confession of ultimate victory over the powers of evil through Christ. The passage is focused by four rhetorical questions: (1) Who is against us? (v. 31) (2) Who will bring a charge against the elect of God? (v. 33) (3) Who is to condemn? (v. 34) (4) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? (v. 35) These questions are indeed rhetorical, but they are not hypothetical. They express the crises faced

recently by Paul and communities loyal to Messiah: (1) there are indeed many adversaries; (2) there are many who bring formal, legal charges; (3) there are some who condemn. The point is that none of this opposition will ultimately prevail. Even the last question (4) is elaborated by trials that come directly out of Paul's recent experience: "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (8:35). Paul has used each of these terms, except for "sword" (*machaira*), in his account of recent troubles.[35] Romans 8:31-39, then, is a personal confession, not just a theological and hypothetical confession. No one can gain victory over and destroy loyalists. Rather, "in all these things [the crises listed] we overwhelmingly conquer (*hypernikōmen*) through him who loved us" (8:37).

This confession seems to have both a backward and a forward look. Facing backward, Paul sees his recent survival of a most serious persecution in Asia (Ephesus, the probable setting of Philippians), and the recent persecution of Messianic assemblies in Macedonia, which he recounts in 2 Corinthians.[36] The parallels between the accounts in 2 Corinthians and Romans 8:35 confirm that the issue of persecution preoccupies Paul's current reflection. But facing ahead, Paul also sees the prospect of opposition to himself and his gospel. He thus asks the Romans "to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unpersuaded in Judea" (Rom 15:30-31). It is quite clear, then, that part of the social setting behind Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:14, 17-21 is the experience of persecution facing Paul and his communities in general.

Is Romans 12:14, 17-21 also intended to address a particular current or imminent crisis facing the various Roman household assemblies?[37] The following arguments can be made in favour of this possibility. (1) The "convergence of motivations"[38] that occasioned the letter to Rome included an interest in speaking to specific problems in the Roman assemblies. (2) Other pieces of the exhortation in Romans 12:1–13:14 were chosen because of their special relevance to the situation of the Roman assemblies.[39] (3) Explicit exhortations to nonretaliation in other Pauline letters were directed to the situation of persecution facing those communities (1 Thess 5:14-15; Phil 4:5). (4) The expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 CE[40] also affected those adhering to Messiah Jesus (Acts 18:1-4), indicating that Jesus Messianists were susceptible to the same anti-Semitism that Jews in general encountered in Rome during this time. (5) The seeds of the popular alienation, which gave Nero the occasion to make "Christians" scapegoats of Rome's destructive fire ten years later in 64 CE,[41] were quite possibly already developing.

This evidence, however, is largely circumstantial. Particularly problematic for the assumption of widespread persecution facing the assemblies in Rome at the time of Paul's writing is the lack of any explicit reference to such a crisis elsewhere in his letter (cf. 1 Thess 3:1-5; Phil 1:27-30). The more probable scenario is that Paul, preoccupied with the recent opposition that he and the Messianic assemblies in the provinces of Asia and Macedonia had been experiencing, especially at the hands of the Roman imperial authority and the elite of Roman society, sees the prospect of persecution in Rome also as a very real possibility.[42] Thus Paul seeks to prepare his readers, so that they might respond properly if hostile opposition from outsiders should arise.

Features of the text itself indicate that the question of responding to hostile opposition is particularly urgent and important for Paul. (1) He recapitulates his exhortation (12:14) not just once (12:17-18) but twice (12:19-21). (2) His exhortation on this topic is more extensive here than in any other passage. (3) The exhortation is carefully grounded and articulated through explicit appeals and allusions to the scriptures. (4) Paul recapitulates the exhortation in 12:19 with the address "beloved," which signifies its importance.[43]

The exhortations in Romans 12:14, 17-21, then, are not only addressed especially to the immediate problem of responding to abuse from outsiders in Rome, but also reflect Paul's own preoccupation with increasing opposition that he and his communities elsewhere were beginningto face. Paul sees the prospect of increased persecution also in Rome as a real possibility and thus seeks to prepare his readers for that eventuality.

The Substance of the Exhortation

Having clarified the literary and social contexts of Romans 12:14, 17-21, we turn to examine the substance and warrants of the exhortation.

Verse 14. The question in regard to this verse is what precisely the command "bless" (*eulogeite*) means here. It might imply "simply a friendly disposition towards the enemy."[44] In this case, "blessing" would entail the same sort of response as to "do good" to one's abuser (1 Thess 5:15; Rom 12:20a; cf. 1 Peter 3:10-11). But with most commentators, it is better to hold that blessing here has its full biblical sense, namely, to call down God's gracious power on someone. In favour of this interpretation are (1) the consistent use of *eulogeō* in the Septuagint with this meaning and (2) the parallels in Matt. 5:44b and Luke 6:28b, which tie the command to bless to the command to pray on behalf of persecutors. Parallels to v. 14 in early Jewish texts indicate that "blessing" may have included prayer

for leniency or forgiveness from God, for their repentance, or for their salvation.[45]

Verse 17a. As the heading of verses 17-21, "To no one repay evil for evil" (*mēdeni kakon anti kakou apodidontes*) presents the fundamental nonretaliatory principle. Its basic meaning is clear, though its precise application remains unspecified. Does it prohibit judicial vindication in addition to vindication by self-help?[46] We will return to this question with the parallel injunction in verse 19a.

Verse 17b. This saying, which is based on the Septuagint text of Proverbs 3:4, is best rendered: "Take forethought for [doing] good in the sight of all people" (*pronooumenoi kala enōpion pantōn anthrōpōn*). The point is not that his hearers should take into consideration what the general population considers to be good,[47] nor that they are to act with good conduct *toward* all people.[48] Rather, the text emphasizes their mental readiness, preparedness, and resolve to act with good conduct in the sight of all people, in the context of the watching world. A similar use of Proverbs 3:4 (LXX) in 2 Corinthians 8:21 clarifies the meaning of v. 17b: ("for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others" [NRSV], *pronooumen gar kala ou mōnon enōpion kyriou alla kai enōpion anthrōpōn*). Paul's concern in 2 Corinthians 8:20-22 is to preclude suspicion, reproach, or opposition that may arise in connection with the offering he is collecting for Jerusalem. The citation of Proverbs 3:4 establishes his interest in ensuring that the collection is evident as honourable in the sight of God and people. Similarly, in verse 17b Paul counsels his readers to take "forethought" (*pronoeomai*) for good behaviour before all people. Messiah-loyalists should avoid any occasion for slander and hostility by exhibiting noble behaviour. This interpretation is confirmed by other texts of Paul that exhort loyalists to display good behaviour in front of outsiders to forestall any negative reactions.[49]

Verse 18 extends the theme of verse 17b with the call to "live in peace with all" (*meta pantōn anthrōpōn eirēneuontes*). The exhortation is, however, introduced with a proviso, *ei dynaton to ex hymōn*, which is best translated, "if possible, so far as it depends on you." What we have here is a realistic acknowledgement that hostility from the opponent may preclude the establishment of true peace. Nevertheless, the proviso implies a unilateral readiness to be at or to pursue peace with all: from your side, do what you can to be at peace. First Corinthians 7:15, the only other text in which Paul refers directly to "peace" with outsiders, also implies this unilateral readiness. For life in the Messianic assembly, however, where peace and righteousness are to be present realities under Christ's lordship, the exhortations to peace are modified by no such proviso. What this indicates is that Paul's ethic of "peace" is closely tied to his redemptive vision and his

ecclesiology. In summary, then, verses 17b-18 stress, as a counterpart to verse 17a, that loyalists must take care to prevent and to minimize conflict by exemplary and conciliatory behaviour in relation to abusers outside the assembly.

Verse 19a, "Do not avenge/vindicate [by/for] yourselves" (*mē heautous ekdikountes*), recapitulates verse 17a, recasting the Septuagint text of Leviticus 19:18a. Since *ekdikeō* can have a range of meanings—from personal self-redress ["vengeance"], to judicial vindication, to executive vindication by a sovereign (see below)—some attention to its particular force here is necessary. At minimum, this command prohibits one from "avenging" injury through personal self-help, self-redress (loosely, "do not vindicate yourselves with your own hands"). The reflexive *heautous* ("yourselves") indicates that this prohibition focuses primarily on personal vengeance.[50] The question further is whether the injunction goes beyond this focus to prohibit the pursuit of judicial vindication. The fact that the counterpart to the prohibition is the command to defer vindication to God suggests either (a) that judicial vindication is included in the prohibition or (b) that judicial vindication is not a realistic option for the alienated victim.

In order to answer this question, it is appropriate to examine another text in Paul that refers to the pursuit of judicial right. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Paul exhorts his readers not to take their legal disputes to the civic courts. Rather, they should either solve their disputes through judicial procedures inside the community of loyalists (vv. 1-6) or endure abuse instead of pursuing judicial vindication (vv. 7-8). Paul favours the latter option of desisting from the pursuit of legal right, though this does not mean the renunciation of all rights as a general rule.[51]

The likelihood that Paul would also have rejected litigation against the unpersuaded, were they in a position to undertake it, is suggested by his beliefs (a) that civic courts are unjust (*adikoi*, 1 Cor 6:1), (b) that the better way is to endure than to litigate (6:7), (c) that the judgment of outsiders is to be left to God (5:12-13), and (d) that Messiah-loyalists will ultimately judge the world (6:2-3). Moreover, the basic similarity in the substance of conduct as applied to relationships within and outside the assembly would also point in this direction. If this is so, it would follow that Romans 12:19a means not only that one ought not to take the law into one's own hands but also that one ought not to pursue legal action against outside abusers in court. In both cases, judgment must be left to God. In other words, if renunciation of legal right is preferable even in the Messianic community where justice is achievable (cf. 1 Cor 5:12-13), how much more in relation to hostile outsiders, a situation in which justice is even more elusive.

Another situation in Paul's life, however, might stand in tension with Paul's command to desist from vengeance. As can be inferred from 2 Cor 2:1-11 and 7:8-11, Paul was apparently offended by a member of the congregation, most likely in the form of slander, during a painful and abortive visit to Corinth. Instead of ignoring or passively accepting the insult, Paul wrote a "painful letter" to the congregation, commanding them to punish the offender and in so doing to show their loyalty to Paul. Now, following the obedient response of the majority in punishing the offender (*epitimia*, 2:6, *ekdikēsis*, 7:11), Paul is encouraged by their renewed loyalty. He exhorts the congregation to forgive (*charizesthai*) and to conciliate (*parakalein*) the offender, and to reaffirm their love for him (2 Cor 2:6-11). The question that arises is: why does Paul not take a forgiving stance, refusing to pursue vengeance, but instead pursues justice against the offender? How can Paul, on the one hand, exhort his readers "not to avenge themselves" (*mē heautous ekdikountes*, Rom 12:19a) and, on the other hand, still claim that it is his role in the assembly "to be ready to avenge every disobedience" (*en hetoimō echontes ekdikēsai pasan parakoēn*, 2 Cor 10:6)?

The answer lies in Paul's understanding of his apostolic role and in distinguishing types of "vengeance" (*ekdikēsis*). Most likely, the slander suffered by Paul was directed at his apostolicity; and for that reason Paul argues that the injustice was not simply against himself but against the entire congregation (2 Cor 2:5). Moreover, it is the apostle's legitimate role to execute justice in the assembly in the name of the Lord Jesus for matters pertaining to internal relations and conduct (2 Cor 10:5; 1 Cor 5:3; cf. 5:12-13).

In Paul, then, we must distinguish various meanings of *ekdikēsis*. First, vengeance (bringing justice) through self-redress is prohibited (Rom 12:19). Second, judicial vindication for injury suffered is discouraged, though not categorically prohibited (1 Cor 6:1-8; Philemon 18-19). Such a pursuit of justice, however, may take place only in the case of conflict between fellow members and must be adjudicated by court procedures within the assembly (1 Cor 6:1-6). For general unrighteousness within the assembly, it is the responsibility of the congregation to mete out justice through judicial procedure (1 Cor 5:12; 2 Cor 13:1). Judicial vindication is probably not an option in the case of injury suffered from hostile outsiders, due to the limited jurisdiction of court proceedings within the community. Third, executive vindication is realized (a) through the deferment of justice to God in the case of injuries suffered from outsiders (Rom 12:19; Phil 4:5; cf. 1 Cor 5:12-13) and in the case of slaves who have no other recourse (Col 3:22-25) and (b) through the agency of apostolic leaders in the case

of unrighteousness or a contrary gospel within the community (1 Cor 5:3-4, 9-13; 2 Cor 10:5, 8; 11:15; 13:10; Gal 1:8-9; 5:10; Rom 3:8).

Verse 20ab ("but 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink'") is cited from Proverbs 25:21 and requires little explanation. The citation is designed as an illustrative example of the general exhortation to do "good" specifically to one's abuser (cf. Rom 12:17b, 21b; 1 Thess 5:15b).

Verse 21 brings verses 17-21 to a close with economy of word: "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good" (*mē nikō hypo tou kakou alla nika en tō agathō to kakon*). The brevity of this verse creates some difficulties for determining its meaning. What does it mean to "be conquered by evil"? What is the force of *nika* ("conquer," "gain victory") in verse 21b? Does verse 21b imply the influencing of evil toward the good; that is, does it mean achieving the abuser's repentance and reconciliation? Or does it imply the ultimate mastery of good over the evil power of the present age?

The imagery of the verse is that of the believer standing in the middle of a battle with "evil." The neuter *to kakon* in verse 21b indicates that the reference is not to an evil person. Rather, "evil" here is the evil power of the present age manifested both in immorality and in the injurious hostility toward Messiah's community. This meaning is evident from the context. First, as we observed earlier, the theme of good versus evil in verse 21 connects with the theme of the conflict and choice between the ages which brackets 12:1–13:14 (12:1-2; 13:11-14; cf. 12:9bc; 16:20). Second, the theme of victory in verse 21 is related to the theme of overwhelming victory over the powers of this age through Christ's love (8:31-39; cf. 1 Cor 15:24-26). Third, the conflict imagery of 12:21 links both literarily and conceptually with the theme of "weapons" appropriate for the battle between light and darkness (13:11-14). As other "armament" texts demonstrate, for Paul it is only the spiritual weapons of the new age that have power to gain victory in the eschatological battle already invading the present (2 Cor 10:2-4; 6:7; 1 Thess 5:5-8). These "weapons," as described in texts addressed to the situation of hardship, are the new stance and conduct ("works," *erga*, Rom 13:12) of the believer: faith, love, hope (1 Thess 5:8), and righteousness (2 Cor 6:7; Rom 6:13). Similarly, then, in Romans 12:21 the chief weapon in the conflict with the powers of evil is "good," implicitly not physical, retaliatory, or destructive force. Whereas loyalists are invited to be passive in regard to their claims against injury suffered, deferring vindication to divine agency (v. 19), here, on the other hand, is the active agency of the assembly in the struggle toward peace and justice (v. 21).

The counter-resonances of Paul's language here with Roman imperial propaganda of Pax (Peace) and Victoria (Victory; Gk. *Nike*) would have been patently evident to Paul's first readers. The celebration of the goddess and the virtue of Victoria as the supernatural power that would bring peace and benefit to her devotees was ubiquitous, broadcasted in monuments, coins, public inscriptions, triumphal parades, public games, and other media throughout the Roman world. Victoria was the guarantor of the Roman world order, held together by the power of the sword—a world order founded on violence but proclaimed as an order of Peace.[52]

"To be conquered by evil" in verse 21a might be understood in a general sense, namely, to grow weary and faithless in the context of the struggle between the powers of the two ages. But the immediate context, particularly the series of paired contrasts in 12:14, 17-21 and the contrast with verse 21b, suggests that "to be conquered" has the more focused meaning of capitulating to the normal means of battle by retaliating and seeking vengeance. Verse 21a can thus be paraphrased: "Do not become faithless in the struggle with evil by resorting to retaliatory measures."

Verse 21b, on the other hand, calls the believer to conquer the evil of the present age with the power of good. This final call is not focused on the goal of the abuser's conversion or reconciliation. Nor is it a matter of mastery over one's abuser. The emphasis is simply on the proper conduct with which one battles evil, the method by which loyalists gain ultimate victory. "Conquering evil with good" might, but will not necessarily, effect a change in the abuser.

The victory in verse 21, then, has both a present and an eschatological aspect, just as the affirmation of victory in 8:37-39 does. For Paul, the present struggle has an eschatological character (13:11-14), and ultimate victory will arrive imminently (cf. 16:20a). But the victory implied in verse 21b also has a present focus, especially since the call of verse 21a, to which verse 21b is contrasted, is oriented to the present situation. This present aspect is founded on Paul's belief that the powers of the coming age have already invaded the present age.

The Warrants of the Exhortation

The previous few paragraphs have raised the question of the aims or goals of the exhortation. We turn now to examine more closely the warrants of the exhortation. In particular, we will focus on the meaning of "heaping coals of fire" in verse 20c, since this is a crux.

As we noted earlier, verses 19 and 20 are parallel exhortations, presenting the proper passive behaviour (v. 19) and active behaviour (v.

20) in response to hostility. Both exhortations contain supporting reason clauses introduced with *gar* ("for"):

> Do not avenge yourselves, beloved,
> but leave room for wrath,
> for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I myself will repay, says
> the Lord."
> But "if your enemy is hungry, feed him,
> if he is thirsty give him drink,
> for by doing so you will heap coals of fire upon his head."

The following exegetical questions arise. Does verse 20c have a parallel significance to verse 19c and refer to eschatological punishment stored against the enemies for the day of vengeance? If so, are both nonretaliation and kind deeds to persecutors grounded in an ulterior motive which really anticipates the punishment of the enemies of the Messianic assembly? Or does verse 20c, as in the standard interpretation, refer either (1) to the pangs of shame and remorse, which either lead to conversion and reconciliation or leave the opponent with a bad conscience, or (2) to the resolve of the adversary to pursue reconciliation?[53]

The standard interpretation is based on four arguments. First, the main argument is that the interpretation of "coals of fire" as eschatological punishment, which supposedly implies the pursuit of revenge, is incompatible with the positive exhortations in the context which promote love, peace, doing good, and blessing toward the abuser. Incompatibility with an eschatological interpretation is further argued on the grounds that the exhortation is based on the teachings of Jesus and breathes the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.

The following points, however, mitigate the decisiveness of this argument. (1) A tension, though not necessarily an incompatibility, already exists between the positive exhortations and the motif of retribution in verse 19c. (2) "Heaping coals of fire" as denoting punishment does not necessarily imply a desire for revenge. Verse 20c need not mean anything more than verse 19c in expressing the reality of God's justice in the cosmos, not necessarily the hope for the abuser's punishment. Moreover, as we shall see, the prospect of punishment noted here probably implies the condition of unrepentant hostility, persistent disbelief. (3) The presence of a tension between positive exhortations for the abuser's well-being and the affirmation of God's punishment of the abuser, in spite of its harshness from a modem point of view, must be seen at least as a possible interpretation, since such a tension occurs elsewhere in Early Judaism and early Christianity. (4) The appeal to the Jesus tradition is

inconclusive, since (a) dependence does not rule out accommodation, and (b) the Jesus tradition also exhibits a tension between non-retaliatory exhortations, including blessing, and proclamations of judgment upon abusers.

A second argument in favor of the standard interpretation is the presence of a rabbinic interpretation of Proverbs 25:22, in which the last phrase *yeshallem lak* ("and he [God] will reward you") is read as *yashlimennu lak* ("and he will make him [the adversary] to be at peace with you," or "and he will surrender him to you"). It is argued that this reading indicates that "heaping coals of fire" symbolizes the hope for reconciliation. The presence of this reading in the Targum is sometimes used to argue for its antiquity and availability to Paul. This rabbinic interpretation, however, is of dubious value for interpreting Romans 12:20. (1) It is not certain that the Targums follow this reading. (2) There is no evidence that this reading was current before the second century CE. (3) Retributive interpretations of Proverbs 25:21-22 were also extant. (4) The rabbinic interpretation, as allegorically applied to conflict with the evil impulse, emphasizes the notion of the *mastery* of the good impulse over the evil impulse, not simply reconciliation. (5) If Paul was aware of the alternative reading of Proverbs 25:22b, and considered it decisive for the interpretation of 25:21-22, he could have emphasized it in the citation to remove any ambiguity.

Third, appeal is made to an Egyptian penitential ritual from the third century BCE involving a forced change of mind. The injurer is required to come back to the injured party carrying a staff in his hand and a tray of burning coals on his head.[54] Some scholars claim that this text provides the background and interpretive clue to the original image of "heaping coals of fire" in Proverbs 25:21-22. Others go so far as to assert that this parallel also controls the meaning of the image in Romans 12:20, symbolizing either the humiliation and remorse of the injurer,' or simply his change of mind and desire for reconciliation.

This argument is also not conclusive. This ritual may help to elucidate the original meaning of Proverbs 25:22. But there is no evidence that Paul was acquainted with this Egyptian practice, as many interpreters favouring the standard interpretation concede. If this parallel is used as an interpretive clue for Romans 12:20, it must be acknowledged that the ritual entails (a) the forced repentance of the injurer, (b) the moral victory and satisfaction of the injured, and (c) the public humiliation and penance of the injurer. The parallel thus rules out the interpretation of "heaping coals of fire" as symbolizing simply the realization of reconciliation and actually suggests an interpretation of v. 20c as "and so you will put your opponent to public shame." Finally, Paul's understanding of this image

is much more likely shaped by its usage in the Hebrew Bible, which we will examine shortly.

The fourth argument is that Paul's deletion of Proverbs 25:22b ("and the Lord will repay you with good," *ho de kyrios antapodōsei soi agatha*) from the citation is read as a rejection of the notion of revenge and private advantage seeking. But an argument about the meaning of any passage on the basis of what is omitted is not very weighty. Even if Paul omitted Proverbs 25:22b from the citation because it might foster a faulty attitude, one can say no more than that Paul sought to avoid any notion of personal reward or private advantage for particular deeds of goodness. This does not mean that Paul meant to preclude a general affirmation of vindication and punishment.

The arguments in favour of the standard interpretation, then, appear to be inconclusive. On the other hand, there are conclusive arguments in favor of the interpretation of "coals of fire" as referring to divine punishment. Four main arguments can be adduced: (1) the background of the image of "coals of fire" in the Hebrew Bible; (2) the usage of "fire" elsewhere in Paul; (3) the parallel structure of verses 19 and 20; and (4) Paul's attitude regarding the fate of enemies of the gospel.

1. In the Hebrew Bible, "coals" and "coals of fire" symbolize divine anger and vengeance, divine punishment on the wicked, a medium for destruction, or an evil passion. Moreover, retribution and culpability are often spoken of as coming upon or being on someone's head. "Heaping coals of fire" nowhere in the Old Testament symbolizes the pain of shame leading to repentance. Since Paul's understanding of this image was likely shaped more than anything else by the usage of this image in the Old Testament, these observations are weighty.

2. The other uses of *pyr* (fire) in Paul's letters all refer to eschatological punishment (1 Cor 3:13, 15; cf. 2 Thess 1:8). While this evidence is somewhat equivocal because of the infrequency of occurrence, its import must not be dismissed.

3. As we have already observed, verses 19 and 20, and particularly the motivational clauses in verses 19c and 20c, display a parallel structure. This structuring, when taken together with the meaning of "coals of fire" in the Old Testament, suggests that "heaping coals of fire" in verse 20 refers to the same prospect of judgment as that expressed in verse 19.

At this point, however, we must clarify the meaning of verse 19bc. Complementing the prohibition "do not avenge yourselves" (v. 19a) is the command *dote topon tē orgē*, "give place to wrath," that is, "give the wrath (of God) an opportunity to work out its purpose" (v. 19b). Here we have an affirmation of God's wrath against the enemies of God, which has primarily an eschatological focus, but probably also a temporal aspect

within history (cf. Rom 1:18-32). That the reference is to God's wrath in particular, as opposed to some mediating instrument of justice, such as the Roman imperium (cf. Rom 13:4-5), is indicated by the clarifying citation of Deuteronomy 32:35 that follows: "For it is written, 'Vindication is mine, I myself will repay, says the Lord'" (*gegraptai gar, emoi ekdikēsis, egō antapodōsō, legei kyrios*). This citation emphasizes the Lord's prerogative for vengeance (*emoi*, *egō*), and the added "says the Lord" reinforces its authoritative character in the manner of prophetic pronouncements. Here we have a specific promise of retribution (*antapodōsō*), not a simple appeal to God's sovereignty to judge as God pleases. There is also here no intimation that wrath is to be understood in terms of a disciplinary effect that leads to repentance.

Verse 19, then, already grounds nonretaliation and good deeds in an eschatological framework that affirms the potential punishment of the enemies. The expectation of eschatological "coals of fire" is not essentially different from the expectation of "wrath" and "repayment."

4. The expressions of judgment upon the adversaries of the assembly elsewhere in Paul's letters confirm and clarify the meaning of "coals of fire" as eschatological punishment.

a. Philippians 4:5; 3:18-21. Philippians 4:5 provides an important parallel to Romans 12:17-21: "Let your clemency (*to epieikes*) be known to all people. The Lord is at hand." This text speaks to the problem of hostility from opponents of the community, exhorts the response of nonretaliation or endurance, and grounds this response with a reference to the imminence of the Lord's return. With the same profile of adversaries in view, Philippians 3:18-21 says of "many. . .who live as enemies (*echthrous*) of the cross of Christ," and "whose God is the belly and whose glory is in their shame, and who set minds on earthly things" that "their end is destruction" (*hōn to telos apōleia*). By contrast, true believers ("we") can anticipate the deliverance from the Saviour from heaven (3:20). For Paul, the rightful end of any "enemy of the cross" is "destruction."[55]

b. Romans 2:5 also illustrates Paul's thinking on the fate of those who display persistent enmity against God:

> But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (NRSV)

Paul is arguing here against those who pass judgment upon another but are impenitent for their own sins (Rom 2:1-4). There is some uncertainty as to whom Paul has in mind in this passage. In any event, a fundamental principle is expressed that helps elucidate Romans 12:19-20: while God's

kindness and forbearance aim at repentance (2:4), continued impenitence stores wrath against a person for the day of judgment. Both Romans 2:5 and 12:19-20 express the themes of "wrath" and the "storing up" of punishment against the impenitent.

c. Paul's statements about "false teachers" also express the expectation of judgment upon these opponents. Similarly to Philippians 3:18-19, Paul says of the "false apostles" against whom he must defend himself in 2 Corinthians 10–13 and whom he describes as "servants of Satan": "Their end will correspond to their deeds" (*hōn to telos estai kata ta erga autōn*, 2 Cor 11:15). Of those who charge Paul of antinomianism, Paul says: "Their condemnation is just" (*hōn to krima ekdikon estin*, Rom 3:8). Of the anonymous instigator of the Galatian heresy Paul says, "and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment" (*krima*, Gal 5:10; cf. 1:8, 9, "let him be cursed," *anathema estō*). As for his own justification and vindication in the face of attempts to undermine his apostolic authority, he defers his case ultimately to God and the final judgment (1 Cor 3:12-15; 4:1-5; 2 Cor 10:18; cf. Rom 14:10-13).

It is clear, then, that Paul expects destruction upon the opponents and persecutors of the community of loyalits. Sometimes this expectation appears as a wish or judicial pronouncement (Phil 3:18-19; 2 Cor 11:15; Rom 3:8; Gal 5:10-12; 1:8, 9). In some cases, it functions primarily to offer the readers a theodicy to help them understand their suffering and the need to act with forbearance (cf. 2 Thess 1:4-10). This expectation accords with Paul's conception of outsiders as being on the road to destruction (*apollymenoi*, 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; cf. 2 Thess 2:10). In particular, the sins of the impenitent, including persecutors, are mounting up and being stored against them for the day of vengeance (Rom 2:5).[56]

This perspective confirms and clarifies the meaning of "coals of fire" as eschatological judgment upon persecutors of the assembly. Faithful conduct in persecution, including nonretaliation and good deeds, is part of the "signal" of judgment upon the persecutor. In this sense, continued impenitence in the face of good deeds increases the persecutor's culpability. This notion does not, however, express the conscious intention of the believer's response of good deeds toward persecutors. It is not that good deeds directly increase the opponent's punishment. Rather, the affirmation of the persecutor's punishment functions as a theodicy to encourage faithfulness and the nonretaliatory conduct. Verse 20, then, like verse 19, grounds nonretaliatory behaviour in the prerogative of God for justice.

One final text helps to clarify Paul's notion of deferring vengeance to God. First Corinthians 5:9–6:6, though not referring specifically to the problem of hostile outsiders, presents two ideas relevant to the present

topic. First, judgment upon outsiders must be deferred to God, while judgment upon insiders is the responsibility of the assembly. This notion appears in 1 Cor 5:9-13, which clarifies Paul's call not to associate with immoral insiders (vv. 9-10) and stresses the need to maintain discipline within the community (cf. 5:1-8):

> For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." (1 Cor 5:12-13, NRSV)

This text emphasizes the need to judge insiders, apparently on the assumption that righteousness can be achieved within the Messiah-confessing community (cf. 5:6-8, 6:9-11). In this case, the judicial procedures of the assembly are an instrument of God's justice. On the other hand, the community desists from judging outsiders since it is God's prerogative and role to do so.

A second notion in 1 Cor 6:1-6 is that loyalists will participate in the eschatological judgment of the unpersuaded world (*kosmos*). While this notion is used to support the main point that Christians should mediate their own disputes and not go to the unjust civic judges, its basic validity for Paul can be seen in the way he introduces it twice: "Do you not know…" (vv. 2, 3). Although this notion appears nowhere else in Paul, it is a common theme in apocalyptic thought and apparently one that was shared by Paul. Thus, while loyalists must defer the judgment of outsiders to God at least for the present (5:9-13), they will eventually participate in the eschatological judgment of outsiders. This judgment would supposedly include the judgment of persecutors, though such a specific notion does not appear in Paul. When Paul refers to the judgment of persecutors, he emphasizes God's role in judgment (Rom 12:19-20; cf. Phil 1:27-30; 4:5; 1 Thess 2:16).

To conclude, both verses 19c and 20c ground the exhortation to nonretaliation and good deeds in Romans 12:17-21 with the notion of God's retribution of the abusers. It is God's prerogative to bring justice (avenge), especially in the case of those outside the community of faith. God will indeed repay evil (v. 19c), and continued impenitence in the face of good deeds increases the opponents' culpability (v. 20c). Thus adherents of Messiah must trustingly defer their cases to God (v. 19b), while responding with nonretaliation and good deeds.

The question that emerges, however, is how one is to understand the tension between the affirmation of God's punishment of the abusers (vv. 19-20) and the call to bless the persecutor, that is, to call down

God's gracious power upon them (v. 14). How can the call to bless be anything but insincere when an affirmation of the abuser's punishment is maintained? This tension might be explained in terms of Paul's citation of different traditions, namely, the Jesus tradition (v. 14) and a separate paraenetic tradition (vv. 17-21). But this explanation is inadequate. Paul presents both notions apparently without seeing any contradiction. Moreover, a similar tension appears elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 3:9-12, the call to nonretaliation and to blessing is grounded eschatologically in both the vindication of the elect and the punishment of the persecutors. And at the early layers of the gospel tradition (source "Q"), the call to bless abusers is countered by the proclamation of judgment upon the enemies of the community.[57]

Ultimately, this tension represents a fundamental theological tension between God's mercy and justice (Rom 2:1-11; 11:22). On the one hand, the believer calls upon God's gracious power on behalf of the abuser, a blessing that aims ultimately at the abuser's repentance and salvation. At the same time, Paul affirms God's righteous rule of the universe, in which wrongs will ultimately be righted and good will prevail. This affirmation provides the framework of justice, a theodicy, in which nonretaliatory conduct can be grounded. The believer prays for the best possible fate of the abuser but leaves the final realization of justice to God. The notion of deferment (v. 19b) provides the key to the tension, even though it does not completely resolve it.

It is noteworthy to observe what possible warrants are lacking here. First, there is no intimation that nonretaliation and good deeds are intended to effect, or will necessarily effect, the conversion and reconciliation of the opponents (cf. *Didache* 1:3). A pragmatic motive of reducing tensions through the display of noble conduct emerges only slightly (vv. 17b-18). Second, Paul does not ground his exhortation by appealing to the authoritative commandments of "the Lord." Paul probably does not know (or regard) the commands on nonretaliation and good deeds as specifically dominical sayings. Indeed, the substance of the exhortations and their warrants derive from Paul's Judean-Jewish ethical heritage prior to his commitment to Jesus as Messiah.[58] Third, and more surprising, there is no christological grounding through a reference to Christ's paradigmatic model of endurance, his path from suffering to glory. We must look at this last point more closely.

The Christological Ground of Nonretaliation

Despite the lack of any direct connections between nonretaliation and christology as there are in 1 Peter 2:21-25, should one suppose a

fundamental connection in Paul's thought? An examination of Paul's theology of suffering seems to point in this direction.

For Paul, suffering is an experience that the Messiah-loyalist essentially shares with Messiah,[59] just as loyalists participate salvifically and sacramentally in Messiah's death.[60] This participation extends to Christ's entire passion, so that adherents also experience this passion in life. Paul interprets his own hardships as an experience of Christ's passion.[61] Moreover, Paul's suffering, like Christ's, has a vicarious effect upon his converts.[62] As for Messiah, so for the Messiah-loyalist, suffering is the necessary prelude to glory; indeed, tribulation produces for loyalists an eternal weight of glory.[63]

The way of Christ's passion, then, is by necessity the way for the Christ-confessor.[64] But more than this, it constitutes a model that one ought to follow. For instance, Christ's pattern of humiliation and exaltation is held up as the model for relationships within the community in Philippians 2:3-11. In "receiving the word in much affliction with joy from the Holy Spirit," the Thessalonians "became imitators (*mimētai*) of us and of the Lord" (1 Thess 1:6). In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Christ's way of becoming poor, even though rich, for the sake of all people is presented as a model to follow in contributing to those in need. Paul describes his own hardships in the same way: "as poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor 6:10).

Given this prototypical and exemplary role of Messiah in suffering, it is curious that Paul does not appeal to it explicitly in the context of Romans 12:14-21. Since the problem of responding to hostility is so critical from Paul's perspective, a christological reference could have provided the clinching argument. Perhaps the best explanation is that the traditional materials on which Paul was dependent here lacked a specific appeal to Christ's teaching or prototypical role.

Nevertheless one must assume a fundamental connection between nonretaliation and christology in Paul's thought. We have already observed the role of christology for Paul's understanding of tribulation. In addition, christology connects with nonretaliation as the theoretical ground for the loyalist's new life (Rom 12:1-2; 6:1–7:6; 8:1-13). If good instead of retaliation is the means to ultimate victory (v. 21), this victory is founded on the "mercies of God" (12:1-2), specifically on Christ's love (8:31-39) and God's love in Christ (5:1-11). Moreover, in the battle against evil, the weapon of "good" (v. 21) comes from "clothing oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ" (13:12-14). Paul's christology, then, provides Paul not only a theoretical ground for his ethic of nonretaliation but also a material ground, insofar as Christ is the prototype and exemplar in suffering.

Conclusion

In the various references to the issue of responding to abuse in Paul's writings a fundamental continuity in the conduct enjoined is evident. Whether the problem concerns conflict within the Messianic assembly or hostility from outsiders, Paul exhorts (a) nonretaliation, including the stance of endurance and the refusal to litigate, (b) kind actions, including the pursuit of peace, and (c) kind words, including blessing and conciliating. But a distinction in exhortations directed to these two situations can be observed in the grounding motivation, a distinction based on Paul's understanding of the apocalyptic character of persecution and his redemptive vision. On the one hand, Paul assumes that righteousness, reconciliation, and peace can be realized, at least provisionally, within the context of the new community; for this context the exhortations to nonretaliation and peace stand unqualified, extending to the call "to forgive." On the other hand, Paul realizes that some hostility toward the assembly will continue until the arrival of the age to come (the *telos*), when universal peace and justice will finally be achieved; for this context, the calls to nonretaliation and peace are grounded especially in the notion of deferment to God's judgment (Phil 4:5; Rom 12:17-21). It is perhaps not accidental that the responses enjoined for this situation do not include calls "to forgive," which is ultimately God's prerogative, although the call to "bless" may likely include prayers for the persecutors' forgiveness from God.

Romans 12:14, 17-21, the lengthiest expression of Paul's ethic of nonretaliation and peace, represents the latter category of exhortations. This passage is addressed especially to the problem of responding to persecutors of Messiah's community. It is apparent from other passages in Romans and Paul's recent letters, especially 2 Corinthians, that the problem of hostility against Paul and his congregations is becoming acute. The formulation and inclusion of 12:14, 17-21 in Romans seems to reflect Paul's own preoccupation with this issue. At the same time, Paul sees the prospect of persecution in Rome as a definite possibility and seeks to prepare his Roman readers for such a situation. Ten years later under Nero, this very crisis would be realized.

The question we have addressed is whether Romans 12:14-21 expresses a nonretaliatory ethic of apocalyptically motivated restraint, as argued especially by Stendahl, or a reconciling ethic of love, as argued by a majority of interpreters. The answer to this question is a qualified both.

On the one hand, the exhortation has a definite apocalyptic character, though not as a mere restraint in the face of God's impending judgment. The warrants in verses 19-20 emphasize the certainty of God's righteous

judgment. Verse 19 grounds the prohibition against vengeance in the deferment of wrath to God, based on God's prerogative for retribution. Verse 20 grounds the call to good deeds in the notion that the sins of the impenitent are being stored against them for the day of wrath (cf. 2:5). In addition, verse 21 frames the call to do good within the context of the eschatological battle of the power of good versus the power of evil. Assured and imminent victory will come through the weapons of good and through God's love in Christ (cf. Rom 5:1-11; 8:31-39; 13:11-14; 16:19-20). The christological pattern of weakness as the means of power and victory is fundamental here.

On the other hand, the exhortation is related to the theme of love (12:9a; 13:8-10). In relation to abusers, Jesus-loyalists are called not simply to desist from retaliation but to bless, to do good, to be at peace, and to take forethought for noble conduct. Indeed, they are called to the unilateral pursuit of peace. The preoccupation of Paul is not with the retribution of the abusers, which is to be deferred to God, but with the proper stance and conduct within the eschatological conflict. Although the exhortation is not aimed primarily at the conversion and reconciliation of the abusers, Paul does not relinquish this hope (v. 18a).

These two aspects, however, stand in tension. On the one hand, Paul calls his readers to bless their persecutors, to call down God's gracious power upon them. On the other hand, Paul affirms God's righteous rule of the universe wherein unrepentant persecutors will ultimately be punished. This affirmation functions mainly as a theodicy that provides the framework for the call to nonretaliatory conduct. Personal vengeance and the pursuit of judicial vengeance in pagan courts are prohibited. The pursuit of judicial vengeance for offenses suffered by fellow loyalists is discouraged and can take place only in the court procedures established within the Messianic community. In all cases, vengeance is properly deferred to the executive vindication of God, whose prerogative it is as ruler of the universe. Some role for adherents in the final judgment is hinted at (1 Cor 6:2-3), in continuity with Jewish apocalyptic beliefs, but never defined or emphasized. In other words, Paul never diminishes his belief in justice. Rather, the issue is one of agency. Vindication and vengeance belong to God.

framework. For further discussion on this last issue, embracing "true myth" over against "literalism" or "allegory," see Macky, *Paul's Cosmic War Myth*, 219-58.

96. See Chapter 10. Perhaps Paul's polemic reflects something in the human psyche, or at least the pattern of many cultural traditions, that actions and words toward the perceived traitor are often more brutal than those toward the enemy, especially when one is in a defensive position.

97. W. Swartley, "War and Peace in the New Testament," *ANRW* II.26.3: 2314-15.

98. Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 36.

99. See further Gordon Zerbe, "Peace and Justice in the Bible," in *Peace and Justice: Essays from the Fourth Shi'i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue*, eds. H. Huebner and M. Legenhausen (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2011), 124-43.

100. See for instance Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

Chapter 9

1. For the thesis that this opening phrase functions as the thesis statement for all of Rom 12:9-21, see Walter Wilson, *Love without Pretense: Romans 12:9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 150-52.

2. The "you" is somewhat dubious textually, omitted in several key manuscripts; see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 528. Arguably the "you" is implied in any case.

3. *makrothymeō*, literally "be macro-passioned," is often translated as being longsuffering, forbearing, or patient. In the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), this term regularly translates the Hebrew idiom "slow to anger" (e.g. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Prov 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11). We might say, "long-fused."

4. See also 1 Pet 2:18-25; Eph 6:5-9.

5. The plural form of the cognate noun *anochē* (used in Rom 2:4; 3:26) could be used for a truce or armistice. See LSJ.

6. For this meaning of *parakalein* here, see BAGD, s.v. "parakaleō," #5. This meaning is also evident in 2 Cor 2:7, used synonymously with *charizesthai* ("forgiving"); 2 Macc 13:23; Luke 15:28; Acts 16:39.

7. For other references to being at peace in Paul that refer particularly to relations within the community, see Rom 14:17, 19; 1 Cor 7:15; 2 Cor 13:11; cf. Col 3:15.

8. For *charizomai* in the sense of "forgive," see also 2 Cor 12:13; Col 2:13.

9. "Ethic" here is used in its colloquial, nonphilosophical sense as "a set of moral principles and values." "Nonretaliation" and "peace" are the best general terms for summarizing the substance of these exhortations, without prejudging their specific interpretation. I deliberately avoid the term "love of enemy" as a descriptive term, since the language of "loving enemies" is not found in Paul's letters and since it already assumes a certain interpretation of the texts.

10. See George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), ch. 3: "The 'Vengeance' of Yahweh," 69-104. Mendenhall identifies three uses of the Hebrew root *nqm* that accord with the uses of the Greek *ekdikein* and the Latin *vindicatio*: (1) to avenge, vindicate through socially sanctioned executive action by royal or divine power; (2) to avenge or to litigate through judicial action; and (3) to take revenge through self-help, extralegal self-redress. All of these are distinguished from defensive vindication, which takes place at the moment of the offending action, whereas the former three are subsequent in time to the offense.

11. See Luise Schottroff, "Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies," in *Essays on the Love Commandment*, ed. L. Schottroff et al (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 16-22. She identifies three attitudes or types of renunciation of revenge in the Greco-Roman world. (1) Nonretaliation as the proper ethic of the underdog, whether exhorted by the powerful or the powerless: the dependent, especially a slave, must accept injustice and has no other recourse than to make a virtue of necessity, since it simply does not pay to attempt to avenge injustice. Here, nonretaliatory acceptance of injustice springs from a position of dependence or alienation. She notes 1 Peter 2:18-25; Col 3:25 in this category, to which 2 Cor 11:19-21 could be added. (2) Nonretaliation and clemency as the ethic of the powerful, appropriate for superiors, rulers in relation to their subjects, or defeated opponents. This ethic is motivated especially by the interest to preserve harmony in the family, body politic, or empire. Here, nonretaliation means the exercise of one's own power. (3) Nonretaliation as the protest of the powerless, based especially on the Socratic prototype: the philosopher is abused by society because of his disturbing teaching but desists from retaliation, declaring himself to be a victim of injustice, in order to proclaim the rottenness of society See Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.54, perhaps the only example of the explicit use of love to an enemy ¡n Greco-Roman philosophy: "For this too is a very pleasant strand woven into the Cynic's pattern of life; he must needs be flogged like an ass, and while he is being flogged he must love (*philein*) the men who flog him, as though he were the father or brother of them all" (LCL).

12. E.g. 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rom 8:18-39; 11:36; 16:20. For references to the eschatological "kingdom," see 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 2:12.

13. E.g. 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rom 2:5, 8; 5:9.

14. For treatments of Paul's redemptive vision along these lines, see esp. Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 115-206; and J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 11-19, 135-367.

15. E.g. Rom 2:10; 8:6; 14:17; cf. Eph 6:15, "the gospel of peace."

16. 2 Cor 5:19; Rom 11:5; cf. Col 1:20.

17. E.g. Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:21, 24-28; Rom 8:28-39; 11:36. Cf. also the language of "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) and the notion of the renewal of the image of God (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:29; 2 Cor 3:18; cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

18. Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; cf. 2 Thess 3:16.

19. For the eschatological reconciliation of all people (Jews and Gentiles), see esp. Rom 11:25-32. See also Eph 2:14-18 for the notion of the eschatological arrival of peace between Jew and Gentile, through the redemptive work of Christ,

who is "our peace." See Chapter 7.

20. See 1 Cor 14:33. Rom 16:20 is particularly noteworthy, since it is "the God of peace" who will "soon crush Satan under your feet."

21. Rom 5:1, related to "reconciliation" in 5:10-12; cf. Col 1:20. Note also Eph 2:14-18; 2 Cor 5:18-20.

22. See above, n. 7.

23. Expressed in salutations (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; Phlm 3: cf. Col 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; Eph 1:2) and benedictions (1 Cor 16:11; Gal 6:16; Rom 15:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:7, 9; 1 Thess 5:23; cf. 2 Thess 3:16; Eph 6:23).

24. For detailed documentation of scholarly opinions on this topic, see the original publication of this essay, in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. W. Swartley, 177-222 (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 182-84.

25. Krister Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation and Love: 1QS X, 17-20 and Romans 12:19-21," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 343-55.

26. For the framework of imminent apocalyptic expectation as providing the foundation for radical conduct in the present, see Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. D. Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 10-11.

27. John Piper, *"Love Your Enemies": Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 114-19.

28. Ibid., 118.

29. For a helpful recent analysis, see Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 755-58.

30. Similarly, J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 739; Jewett, *Romans*, 758-79. For the view that Paul limits his exhortation to relations within the community, see Kent Yinger, "Romans 12:14-21 and Nonretaliation in Second Temple Judaism: Addressing Persecution within the Community," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 74-96.

31. Regarding Paul the persecutor, see 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6; on persecution from outsiders, see 1 Cor 4:12, 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 4:29; 5:11; 6:12; cf. 2 Cor 11:23-26.

32. E.g. Rom 2:9; 3:4; 5:12, 18; 1 Cor 7:7; 15:19; 2 Cor 3:2; 4:2; Gal 5:3; 1 Thess 2:15; cf. Col 1:28.

33. E.g. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. D. Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 40-41.

34. See J. Christiaan Beker, *Suffering and Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 57-79.

35. *thlipsis*, tribulation: 2 Cor 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2; Phil 1:16; 4:14; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Thess 1:4. *stenochōrja*, distress: 2 Cor 6:4; 12:10; cf. Rom 2:9. *diōgmos*, persecution: 2 Cor 12:10; 2 Thess 1:4; cf. *diōkein*, 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 4:29; 5:11; 6:12. *limos*, famine: 2 Cor 11:27. *gymnotēs*, nakedness: 2 Cor 11:27; cf. *gymnos*, 2 Cor 5:3-4; *gymniteuesthai*, 1 Cor 4:11. *kindynos*, peril: 2 Cor 11:26; cf. 1 Cor 15:30.

36. 2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 7:5; 11:23-28. If Romans is dated in the

summer/fall of 56 CE, 2 Cor 1-9 and 10-13 date to fall 55/spring 56 CE The Asian crisis of Paul probably occurred in the summer of 55 CE Paul also refers to his experience of persecution in 1 Thess 1:6; 2:2, 14-16 (ca. 50—51 CE); 1 Cor 4:12 (ca. 54 CE); and Gal 4:29; 5:11; 6:12 (ca. 56 CE). For these dates, see esp. Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 54-55. For the persecution facing the Macedonian churches, see 2 Cor 8:2; cf. Phil 1:27-30, probably written in the summer of 55 CE during Paul's Asian imprisonment.

37. See Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 738: the exhortation reflects the church's status as an "endangered species, vulnerable to further imperial rulings against Jews and societies."

38. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 59-74.

39. Notably Rom 12:3-8, 10, 13, 15-16, in terms of the dynamics of internal disunity and rivalry (Rom 14:1-15:13).

40. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.

41. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

42. For Paul's counter-imperial perspective in Romans, see Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

43. *agapētoi* occurs especially for emphasis in paraenetic contexts: 1 Cor 10:14; 1:58; 2 Cor7:1; 12:19; Phil 2:12; 4:1; cf. 1 Cor 4:14. The same term is also strikingly used in Romans to refer (a) to the broad scope of his readers in Rome, "all God's beloved in Rome" (1:7), (b) particular individuals named as his "beloved" (Rom 16:5, 8, 9, 12), and (c) the special status of the Jews as a whole as God's "beloved" (11:20). Jewett (*Romans*, 774-75) proposes that the emphatic use of *agapētoi* in 12:19 might be designed to appeal to a special group of returning refugees (whom Paul has met earlier) that are now subject to prejudice.

44. E.g. H.-G. Link, "Blessing," *NIDNTT* 1:215.

45. See Gordon Zerbe, *Non-retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 234-35.

46. For the pattern of judicial self-help, or self-redress, in relation to other patterns of vindication from an anthropological perspective, see Douglas Fry, *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88-91, 108-113.

47. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 747; Jewett, *Romans*, 772-73: "Within the context provided in Romans, a saying that otherwise seems to demand social conformity and ethical relativism is lifted up into the service of divine righteousness."

48. E.g. Klassen, *Love of Enemies*, 116.

49. See also 1 Thess 4:10b-12; Rom 13:13; Phil 2:15; 1 Cor 10:32-33; 2 Cor 6:3; cf. Rom 13:3-4; Col 4:5-6.

50. Lev 19:1 8a, LXX: *kai ouk ekdikatai sou hē cheir*, "your own hand shall not avenge for itself." The LXX translation clarifies Lev 19:18a by using the Hebrew idiom of "saving/avenging with one's own hand," i.e. avenging by self-help, perhaps to exclude other forms of vindication from the prohibition. For this idiom, see 1 Sam 25:26, 31, 33; Judg 7:2; Deut 8:17; CD ["Damascus Document" of the Essenes] 9:8-10. Philo (*On the Special Laws* 3.91, 96; 4.7-10) and Josephus

use the term *autocheir* ("self-handed") for this.

51. Philemon 17-19 confirms this noncategorical preference. Paul assumes that Philemon as a slave owner can legitimately pursue his legal right for compensation, either for the loss of work incurred through his slave's defection or for some unknown injury. But Paul also implies that Philemon should give up this right to compensation; he recommends that the loss be "charged to his account" and that Philemon is himself indebted to Paul.

52. J. Rufus Fears, "The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems," *ANRW* 17.2: 737-826; Jewett, *Romans*, 779.

53. For detailed documentation for this next section, see the fuller discussion in Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 249-64.

54. For the text, see F. L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 32: "I will cause him to bring this book hither, a forked stick in his hand and a censer of fire upon his head."

55. Phil 1:28 might also be cited here. But that ambiguous text more likely refers to the adversaries' hope for the Messianic community's demise. See my forthcoming *Philippians* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Herald Press).

56. A similar notion is evident in 1 Thess 2:16, the latter part most certainly, and all of it probably, however, is an editorial addition to Paul's text after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

57. On eschatological judgment for unrepentance and the rejection of Jesus's message, see Matt 10:14-15/Luke 10:10-12; Matt 11:21-23/Luke 10:13-15; Matt 12:38-42/Luke 11:29-32. On judgment for the persecution of Jesus and his followers, see Matt 23:29-30, 34-36/Luke 11:47-48, 49-51; Matt 23:37-39/Luke 13:34-35; Matt 24:45-51/Luke 12:42-46. For discussion, see Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 198-204.

58. See Zerbe, *Non-retaliation*, 232-40.

59. 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10-11; Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:10-12; Gal 6:17; cf. Col 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13; 5:1.

60. Gal 2:19-20; 6:15; cf. 3:27; Rom 6:1-11; cf. Col 2:11-14; 3:3.

61. Gal 6:17; 2 Cor 4:7-11; 1 Cor 15:30-32. Paul's and Christian suffering is also on Christ's behalf: Phil 1:27-28; 2 Cor 4:11; 12:10.

62. 2 Cor 4:12. Cf. Phil 2:17; Eph 3:1, 13.

63. 2 Cor 4:17. Cf. Rom 5:2-4; 8:17-18; Phil 3:10-11; on the necessity of suffering, cf. 1 Thess 3:4.

64. See Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); idem, *Inhabiting the Crucified God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. ch. 4: "While We Were Enemies": Paul, the Resurrection, and the End of Violence, 129-60.

Chapter 10

1. For the application of this image to Scripture, I am indebted to Clark H. Pinnock, "'This treasure in earthen vessels': the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible," *Sojourners* Oct 9 (1980): 16-19. The figural use of this text beyond