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Romans 12:14-21 and Nonretaliation in Second Temple Judaism: Addressing Persecution within the Community

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COMMENTATORS ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS are nearly unanimous in their opinion that Rom 12:9-13 assumes a setting of relations within the congregation, while 12:14-21 concerns relations with (unbelieving) outsiders.¹ Verse 14, "Bless those who persecute" (τοὺς διώκοντας), is taken to mark this shift from internal to external relations. The ensuing references to "all persons" (vv. 17,18), and to one's "enemy" (v. 20) would seem to reinforce this impression. We will argue instead that Rom 12:14-21 continues the ecclesial focus of 12:1-13.² The "persecutors" and "enemies" referred to are persons *within* the fellowship, not hostile outsiders. This will reveal a coherent argument running throughout chap. 12 and forming the theological backdrop for the more concrete admonition of 14:1-15:13. Furthermore, when Paul speaks as he does in 12:14-21, he is adopting a Jewish tradition which already brought many of these elements together, in order to give instructions on responding to a wrong suffered at the hands of a fellow believer.

¹ Proponents of this view include C E B Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols., ICC, Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1979) 2:629-29, 640-41, J D G Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38B, Dallas Word, 1988) 737-39, U Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EKKNT 6/3, Neukirchen-Vluyn Neukirchener Verlag, 1982) 22, J A Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (TPI New Testament Commentaries, London SCM, 1989) 303

² See the hints in this direction by D A Black, "The Pauline Love Command: Structure, Style, and Ethics in Romans 12:9-21," *Filologia neotestamentaria* 2 (1989) 9-10, and by R P Ashe, "Rom 12:13-14," *ExpTim* 39 (1927-28) 46

I. The Inadequacy of the Usual Interpretation

In spite of widespread agreement, the view that Rom 12:14-21 pertains to relations with unbelieving persecutors outside the church has considerable difficulties. The most obvious problem is that of explaining the interruption (vv. 15-16) immediately after Paul has purportedly introduced the theme of relations with nonbelieving persecutors in v. 14. Although v. 15 could conceivably be taken either way (i.e., with internal or external focus), exegetes, with very few exceptions, understand v. 16ab, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" (*NRSV*), as a clear reference to relations within the community, not to persecution.³

Of course, this interruption has been noted by the majority of commentators, but efforts at explanation fail to convince. Charles Talbert sees in vv. 14, 15, 16c, 17b, 19b and 20 redactional additions to "a traditional unit of ethical instruction, originating probably in Semitic Christianity"; but this still leaves vv. 16ab (relations within the community) heading a unit dealing with outsiders (vv. 16ab, 17a, 18-19a, 21).⁴ Ernst Käsemann appeals to the lack of apparent order in this "collection" of Jewish sapiential sayings as reason enough not to expect any consistent flow of thought,⁵ but subsequent literary-critical studies have demonstrated that this chapter, far from being a loosely organized collection of disparate maxims, is a carefully crafted rhetorical argument.⁶ Cranfield suggests that Paul switches to the theme of internal harmony in v. 16 only because of the effect the harmony will have on outsiders, thus preserving the overall focus of the paragraph on outsiders.⁷ In this case, however, we might reasonably expect some clue such as an added "lest you give cause for blaspheming" or the like. Finally, Gordon Zerbe suggests that vv. 15-16 "are probably meant as an exhortation to [internal] harmony specifically in the situation of abuse [by outsiders], thus naturally following v. 14,"⁸ but this requires him to take not only "weeping," "haughty," and "lowly" (vv. 15-16) but also the "rejoicing" in v. 15 as words referring to believers under persecution. Although Christians are enjoined throughout the

³ The exceptions include Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, 2. 642-44, and D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956) 341-46.

⁴ C. Talbert, "Tradition and Redaction in Romans XII.9-21," *NTS* 16 (1969-70) 91. For comment on Talbert's literary critical methods, see J. Piper, *Love Your Enemies: Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis* (SNTSMS 38; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 14-15.

⁵ E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 345, 347.

⁶ See the section below on the literary structure of Romans 12.

⁷ Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, 2. 643.

⁸ G. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts* (JSPSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 225.

NT to rejoice under persecution, the maxim in v. 15 is traditional, so “those who rejoice” are more likely persons experiencing good fortune.⁹

That brings us to a second problem with the usual interpretation. In a letter to Christians in Rome, why does Paul turn to the subject of response to persecutors in vv. 14-21? This touches upon the thorny question of the purpose and occasion of the epistle, which we cannot hope to resolve in these few pages.¹⁰ For those who view the Epistle to the Romans more or less as a general compendium of Paul’s theology having relatively little reference to specific social or historical causes in the Roman church, these verses are simply part of a paraenesis, which, for whatever reason, Paul thinks important enough to include. Yet the majority of modern interpreters rightly consider it necessary to seek some occasion, whether in Paul’s experience or in that of the Roman house churches, to explain the inclusion of this instruction. They founder, however, when they collide with the fact that in the epistle itself there is no evidence of any current or imminent crisis of persecution facing the believers in Rome. While we cannot definitively rule out hostility from religious or political authorities, the only hard evidence for it in the letter is τοὺς διώκοντας in v. 14.¹¹ Thus, most supporters of the traditional interpretation are unable to give this passage a convincing social-historical setting.

A third difficulty with this exegetical consensus is its tendency to obscure the carefully crafted argument stretching from 12:1–15:13. On the traditional reading, not only do vv. 15-16 ill fit their immediate literary context but also the entire paragraph (vv. 14-21) seems out of place as part of a larger argument aimed at fostering genuine love, harmony, and mutual acceptance among believers who are disdaining one another.

II. A Jewish Tradition of Response to Conflicts within the Community

In this section we will analyze a number of Jewish texts of the Second Temple period, identify the thematic elements common to the emerging tradition of nonretaliation, and compare these elements to those found in Paul’s argument. In the final section we will return to Romans 12 to demonstrate exegetically how this Jewish tradition informs Paul’s language and mode of argumentation, in line with our thesis stated above in the first paragraph.

⁹ Compare 1 Cor 12 26, Arrian *Epict Diss* 2 5 23, Job 30 25 (LXX), Sir 7 34, Philo *Jos* 94, *T Gad* 7 1, *T Iss* 7 5, *T Jos* 17 7

¹⁰ See *The Romans Debate* (ed K P Donfried, revised and expanded ed, Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1991)

¹¹ Most mss add ὑμᾶς (“those who persecute you”), which might strengthen the idea of current persecution. Although the editors of the fourth edition of the *UBSGNT* chose to include it in brackets, the presence of “you” in Matt 5 44 (= Luke 6 28) suggests that its presence in Romans is the result of assimilation by copyists, which would make the shorter reading (found in p⁴⁶, B, 6, 424^c, 1739, vg^{ww}, Clement) the original one. The external evidence is fairly even: see *TCGNT*, 528

A. Six Thematic Elements of Paul's Argument

We list here the thematic elements of Paul's argument in Rom 12:14-21, for convenient comparison with the Jewish texts:

1. Bless or do good to those who wrong you (vv. 14a,20,21b).
2. Do not curse them or repay evil for evil (vv. 14b,17a).
3. Maintain solidarity, harmony, peace (vv. 15,16,18).
4. Consider what is "noble in the sight of all" (v. 17b).
5. Do not avenge yourselves (v. 19a).
6. Vengeance belongs to God (v. 19bc).

Parallels to individual elements in this list, in both Jewish and Hellenistic literature, have long been noted by commentators.¹² Generally, however, it has gone unnoticed that a *combination* of these elements occurs in certain intertestamental Jewish texts.¹³ Our aim here is to collect the texts where such a combination occurs, examine their setting and purpose, and determine whether a pattern of argumentation can be ascertained in the settings.

Although the combination of these elements does not occur in the OT, the number of biblical citations and allusions in Rom 12:14-21 suggests that the *roots* of this tradition do in fact lie in the OT. Jewish injunctions against personal vengeance can be traced to Lev 19:17-18:

(17) You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. (18) You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (NRSV)

The passage concerns response in the case of perceived wrongdoing at the hands of a fellow Jew.¹⁴ Hatred "in the heart" is dissembled hatred in which one outwardly maintains peace but inwardly plots revenge. The right path consists of genuine love and open reproof. In LXX Prov 20:9c this same injunction against taking one's own revenge is connected not with the theme of divine vengeance but with that of waiting upon the Lord for help: "Do not

¹² See Zerbe, *Non-Retaliatio*, 15-26.

¹³ See, for instance, H.-W. Kuhn, "The Impact of the Qumran Scrolls on the Understanding of Paul," *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (STDJ 10; ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 334; K. Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliatio and Love: 1QS x, 17-20 and Rom. 12:19-21," *HTR* 55 (1962) 343-55; W. T. Wilson, *Love without Pretense: Romans 12.9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature* (WUNT 46; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991) 92-126; Zerbe, *Non-Retaliatio*, 34-173.

¹⁴ See especially J. L. Kugel, "On Hidden Hatred and Open Reproach: Early Exegesis of Leviticus 19:17," *HTR* 80 (1987) 43-61, and A. Nissen, *Gott und der Nächste im antiken Judentum: Untersuchungen zum Doppelgebot der Liebe* (WUNT 15; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck] 1974) 278-329. Paul alludes to Lev 19:18a in Rom 12:19a, and to Lev 19:18b in Rom 13:9b.

say, 'I will take vengeance on the enemy,' but wait for the Lord that He may help you."¹⁵

Paul supports his prohibition of personal vengeance in Rom 12:19 by citing Deut 32:35, which places vengeance and recompense in the Lord's hands, but neither in the LXX nor in the MT does the text in Deuteronomy contain an injunction against personal vengeance.¹⁶ As we will now see, *it was in postbiblical Jewish literature that the prohibition against personal retribution was first grounded in God's prerogative to avenge.*

B. Jewish Texts of the Second Temple Period

1. *The Damascus Document.* Our first example of this developing traditional connection is found in *The Damascus Document* (CD) 9.2-5:

And what it says: "Do not avenge yourself or bear resentment against the sons of your people": everyone of those who entered the covenant who brings an accusation against his fellow, unless it is with reproach before witnesses, or who brings it when he is angry, or he tells it to his elders so that they despise him, he is "the one who avenges himself and bears resentment". Is it not perhaps written that only "he (God) avenges himself and bears resentment against his enemies"?¹⁷

This first subsection (9.2-8a) in a section dealing with the regulation of the community's internal affairs warns against taking improper vengeance upon a fellow sectarian when one has been wronged and admonishes those in the community to follow proper procedure in giving reproof. It begins with the injunction in Lev 19:18a, then expands upon the injunction by specifying three improper responses to being wronged: (1) accusing another in the community tribunal prematurely, (2) accusing in the heat of anger, and (3) seeking to dishonor the other. One who acts thus "avenges himself and bears resentment" and has become a transgressor of the commandment. Such behavior violates the explicit command of Lev 19:18a, and it fails to acknowledge the fact, emphasized by the citation of Nah 1:2b at the end, that vengeance on enemies is a divine prerogative.

Thus this passage forbids bringing evil through improper accusations (theme no. 2) and taking personal vengeance (no. 5) against a fellow sectarian,

¹⁵ Such private vengeance can also be proscribed by referring to the *lex talionis*; cf. Prov 24:28-29.

¹⁶ The text form in Rom 12:19 and in Heb 10:30 is closer to the targums than to either the LXX or the MT. See F.-J. Ortkemper, *Leben aus dem Glauben: Christliche Grundhaltungen nach Römer 12-13* (NTAbh 14; Münster: Aschendorff, 1980) 110-11.

¹⁷ All translations of the QL are taken from F. García Martínez and W. G. E. Watson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

and it grounds this in the divine prerogative to vengeance (no. 6) citing Lev 19:17-18 and Nah 1:2. There is no explicit mention of blessing the wrongdoer, doing good, or maintaining solidarity (nos. 1, 3, and 4). Of particular interest is the fact that the terminology of an "enemy" can be applied to fellow sectarians who have wronged one, and this is all set in the context of avoiding improper responses to personal injury within the community. The text further assumes such enemies will be subject to divine vengeance if they do not repent.

2. *The Manual of Discipline*. The following vow is contained in 1QS 10.17-18:

I shall not repay anyone with an evil reward;
with goodness I shall pursue the man
For to God (belongs) the judgment of every living being,
and it is he who pays man his wages.

This is found in a series of vows (10.17-11:2) dealing mainly with proper attitudes and behavior toward others, both within and without the community. It is preceded by a dogmatic affirmation of God's authority of judgment over all his creatures: "I realize that in his hand lies the judgment of every living thing" (10.16-17). Lines 17-18 open this section with a commitment to do good to the one who has done harm, rather than taking personal revenge. Because elsewhere the sectary is exhorted to hate the wicked and the enemies,¹⁸ some commentators have sought to avoid this apparent contradiction by taking בָּטוֹב, "with good," not as the beginning of the second clause but as the end of the first, thus reversing the meaning: "I will not repay evil with good, each one will I pursue,"¹⁹ but H.-J. Fabry has brought convincing arguments against this translation.²⁰ Further, as we have begun to see, doing good to an enemy and avoiding vengeful behavior was a common motif in Jewish literature of this period.²¹

The perceived tension between this rejection of personal revenge and the hatred toward the wicked found elsewhere is resolved when we recognize that

¹⁸ Compare 1QS 1.3, 10; 2.6; 9.21-22; 10.19-20. See also Josephus *J.W.* 2 §139, "He (the Essene) swears . . . to hate the wicked always and to fight together with the good" (quotation taken from A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings From Qumran* [Cleveland: Meridian, 1962] 73 n. 3).

¹⁹ K. Schubert, "Die jüdischen und judenchristlichen Sekten im Lichte des Handschriftenfundes von En Fešcha," *ZKT* 74 (1952) 1-62, esp. p. 55; H. Wildberger, "Die 'Sektenrolle' vom Toten Meer," *EvT* 13 (1953) 25-43, esp. p. 37.

²⁰ H.-J. Fabry, *Die Wurzel ŠÜB in der Qumran-Literatur* (BBB 46; Cologne/Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1975) 195-96 n. 392. His reasons are (1) that הָשִׁיב is never connected with its direct object by כּ or ל, (2) that the proposed arrangement makes the first clause too long, and (3) that comparison with Ps 7:5-6 makes it likely that רַע was meant to end the first clause.

²¹ See also Hippolytus *Elenchos* 9.23: the Essenes were required "to hate no man, neither the unjust nor the enemy, but to pray for them" (quotation from Dupont-Sommer, *Essene Writings*, 99 n. 2).

the potential objects of vengeance in this passage are not the wicked outside the community, but other members of the community itself who may have caused personal affront or harm.²² The objects of the series of vows in 10.17–11:2 fluctuate between outsiders and insiders; there is no systematic pattern which would clearly favor one or the other in 10.17-18. Elsewhere, such vows of nonretaliation refer consistently to fellow Israelites or fellow sectaries, not to the wicked in general.²³ The same idea is expressed in IQS 10.20 and 7.9, clearly in reference to members of the sect, and CD 9.2-5 may be taken as an expansion upon this vow, likewise focused upon intracommunitarian settings. Further, to interpret 10.18 (“with goodness I shall pursue the man”) in reference to outsiders would seem to contradict the ensuing vows, which do pertain to outsiders. In the later lines, the speaker vows to refrain from envy toward the “men of the pit” and from involvement in strife with them until the Day of Vengeance (10.19), but this is combined with an anger toward them that cannot be content until God’s retribution falls (10.20). Also, it is difficult to conceive of the sectarian acting without mercy toward backsliders (10.21), but “with goodness” toward the wicked outside the sect (10.18). Instead, it is fellow sectarians whom one pursues with goodness, according to 10.26–11.1. Refraining from human retribution is then grounded in the axiom of divine recompense of deeds: “it is he who pays man his wages.”²⁴ Human (that is, personal) retribution is improper, since it encroaches upon divine prerogatives.²⁵

²² Zerbe (*Non-Retaliation*, 117-26) brings five arguments in favor of applying IQS 10 17-18 to outsiders (1) In 11 1b-2 there is reference to outsiders, and 11 1b-2 forms a bracket with 10 17-18 because of the word מִשְׁפָּט We may counter that מִשְׁפָּט also occurs at 10 11,13,16,18, 11 2,5,10,12,14, making a bracket specifically with 10 18 doubtful (2) In 10 18 there is reference to “every living being” We may answer that this occurs in a supporting argument about God’s dealings with humanity, not in reference to the *sectarian’s* behavior (3) “Elsewhere in IQS the parallel usage of אִישׁ and גִּבּוֹר applies to all people (4 20,23)” We may object that in 4 20 גִּבּוֹר is parallel not to אִישׁ, but to “those from among the sons of men” (מִבְּנֵי אִישׁ) whom God cleanses for himself (the elect) (4) The vows immediately following (in 10 18-20) focus on relations with outsiders, and the concluding vow (11 1-2) urges response to oppressors “with humility” (= with good) Our arguments lead to a different view (5) Lev 19 18 (doing good to one’s neighbor) is not alluded to in these lines This is an argument from silence, and what would preclude our seeing in the pursuit of someone with goodness (IQS 10 18) an echo of the commandment “love your neighbor” in Leviticus?

²³ See Nissen, *Gott und der Nächste*, 304-29, for a thorough treatment of this issue in Jewish literature generally

²⁴ On “divine recompense according to deeds” in Judaism and Paul, see K. Yinger, *To Each according to Deeds Divine Judgment according to Deeds in Second Temple Judaism and in Paul’s Letters* (Ph D diss., University of Sheffield, 1995)

²⁵ Note the emphatic הוּא, “and he it is,” in our fourth clause See also the previous clause, which likewise emphasizes this divine prerogative “for to God belongs the judgment of every living being”

(no. 2 = injunction against vengeance, no. 5), grounded in the divine prerogative (no. 6). In the lines immediately preceding and following this passage patience and endurance in such situations are stressed, and the motivation of a positive reward is added.³¹ Doing good (no. 1) is not mentioned in relation to one's adversary, but it does occur in the following admonition on treatment of orphans, widows, and the wretched (50:6). In both recensions the divine repayment is eschatological ("on the day of the great judgment").

4. *The Testament of Gad*.³² Chapters 6–7 of *The Testament of Gad* constitute a unit revolving around the theme of brotherly love.³³ The case of being wronged by a fellow Jew is in view.³⁴ "Hatred" of such a one (thematic element no. 2) is repeatedly forbidden.³⁵ Instead, one blesses or does good to the wrongdoer (no. 1) by demonstrations of love "in deed and word" (6:1b),³⁶ forgiveness (6:3b,7), prayer for the offender "that he may prosper completely" (7:1), and quiet, patient endurance that seeks genuine peace (6:3,6 and 7:4 which belong to theme no. 3). Such behavior is grounded not only in the divine prerogative of vengeance (no. 6), but equally in the fear of transgressing and the promise of reward.³⁷ One is not to repay evil for evil (no. 2), since that may result in worse harm to oneself (6:5), and refusing to respond in kind may lead to the offender's repentance (6:6b). An intriguing parallel to

³¹ Compare 50:2,5. Paul, too, stresses patience and endurance (Rom 12:12), but he omits any mention of positive reward in 12:9-21 (cf. 13:3b, however).

³² On the date and provenance of *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, H. C. Kee ("Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *OTP* 1. 777-78, 780) thinks of Syrian Judaism of the second century B.C.E.; M. de Jonge (*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* [Van Gorcum's theologische bibliotheek 25; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953] 117) thought in terms of Christian literary production, but then in a later work (M. de Jonge, *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation* [SVTP 3; Leiden: Brill, 1975] 183-92, 193-246) he modified his view and saw *The Testaments* as a Christian interpretation of pre-existing Jewish literature.

³³ Compare *T. Gad* 6:1, "each of you love his brother"; 7:7, "love one another in uprightness of heart." Although the OT love command of Lev 19:18b may not be cited in *T. Gad* 6:1-7:7, it is clear that the exhortations to nonretaliation, patterned after those of Lev 19:17-18a, are set within the framework of love of brethren (*T. Gad* 6:1; 7:7), which can have no other OT precedent than Lev 19:18b.

³⁴ This belongs to "the sphere of private relations among Jews" (Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 147).

³⁵ 6:1,2b,3b,5b; 7:7.

³⁶ Note once again the echo of Lev 19:17-18. Love of a brother must be genuine ("in deed and word and inward thoughts," *T. Gad* 6:1c) rather than simply a deceitful covering for hidden hatred (6:1b,2,3b; 7:7). Compare Paul's thematic announcement at the head of Rom 12:9-21, "let love be genuine" (v 9a).

³⁷ For the divine prerogative, compare 6:7, "leave vengeance to God"; 7:2b, "remember that all humanity dies"; 7:4-5, "wait for the Lord to set the limits." For fear of transgressing and promise of reward, compare 6:2; 7:2-4.

Paul's "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" is found in negative form in 7:1, "If anyone prospers more than you, do not grieve (μη λυπεῖσθε)."

Thus, we have elements nos. 1, 2, 3, and 6 combined here to instruct on love among brethren, particularly when that love is threatened by personal injury. Although a prohibition of personal *vengeance* (no. 5) is not explicitly mentioned, it is hardly different from the prohibition of personal *retribution*, and it is clearly implied by the command to "leave *vengeance* to God" (6:7).³⁸ Thus far we have found little that might correspond to the Pauline element no. 4 ("consider what is noble in the sight of all people," Rom 12:17). However, *T. Gad* 6:5-6 warns against letting an outsider (one not personally involved in the dispute) hear secrets (one's own secret hatred and vengeful thoughts against an adversary), lest he "absorb your venom" and do even greater harm. Instead, the author writes, "be quiet and do not become upset," so that "he [the adversary] will honor you, will respect you, and be at peace." Though this is only an indirect correspondence at best, it stresses that proper behavior toward "outsiders" during an internal dispute deserves careful consideration in order to maintain honor, respect, and peace in the larger community.³⁹

5. *Pseudo-Phocylides*. In the pseudonomistic Jewish-Hellenistic wisdom poem called *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, lines 76-78, we find the following maxims:

Practice self-restraint, and abstain from shameful deeds.

Do not imitate evil, but leave vengeance to justice.

For persuasiveness is a blessing, but strife begets only strife.⁴⁰

These follow some sayings about not envying friends or fixing reproach upon them, as strife among the "blessed ones" (heavenly bodies) would destroy heaven itself (lines 70-75). In good Hellenistic gnomic fashion the author commands self-restraint (σωφοσύνη) and abstinence from shameful deeds. Next comes the maxim about refraining from doing ("imitating") evil (Pauline element no. 2),⁴¹ which confirms our suspicion that an "evil" has been perpetrated.

³⁸ The wording in *T. Gad* 6:7 (καὶ δὲς τῷ Θεῷ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν) is strongly reminiscent of Rom 12:19 (ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ [that is, to God's vengeance, ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκης]).

³⁹ Two additional passages in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *T. Benj.* 4:2-4 and *T. Jos.* 18:2, show close affinity to the tradition we are tracing but lack the crucial elements "take no vengeance" and "vengeance belongs to God." Their setting is also uncertain (conflict within Judaism, or a more universal ethic?).

⁴⁰ Translation by P. W. van der Horst, "Pseudo-Phocylides," *OTF*, 2: 577.

⁴¹ Greek μη μιμοῦ. The connection with element no. 2 ("do not repay evil for evil") is even clearer if P. W. van der Horst (*The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* [SVTP 4; Leiden: Brill, 1978] 166) is correct in suggesting that μιμεῖσθαι here "is almost equivalent" to ἀποδιδόναι in 1 Thess 5:15 and Rom 12:17.

This is grounded in the admonition to “leave vengeance to justice” (element no. 6), thus showing that not to imitate evil is akin to taking no vengeance for one’s self (no. 5). “Justice” may be God’s justice, but the author more likely has in mind abstract Hellenistic notions of justice, since this document represents a transition from biblical wisdom literature to Hellenistic gnomic literature.⁴² The supporting maxim in line 78 commends persuasion of a wrongdoer (or negotiation with him) in place of doing evil in return. This is termed a “blessing” (which amounts to Pauline element no. 1). Implicitly, harmony here in *Pseudo-Phocylides* appears as the opposite of strife, which is condemned (no. 3). A context of community conflict is perceptible, at best, only in the distant background of this passage (behavior among one’s circle of friends and associates).

6. *Joseph and Aseneth*. As with so many of the Jewish documents of this period, the exact date and provenance of *Joseph and Aseneth* are uncertain, but it is generally accepted that this work “enhances our knowledge of Greek-speaking Judaism around the beginning of the present era.”⁴³ When the wicked brothers Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher had unsuccessfully attempted to kill Aseneth, protected miraculously by God, they hid in fear from their righteous brothers, who wished to avenge this wrongdoing. *Joseph and Aseneth* 29:10,14 tells us how Aseneth restrained the righteous brothers.

“I beg you, spare your brothers and do not do them evil for evil, because the Lord protected me against them, and shattered their swords, and they melted on the ground like wax from the presence of fire. And this is enough for them that the Lord fights against them for us.” (28:10)

And Aseneth stretched out her right hand and touched Simeon’s beard and kissed him and said, “By no means, brother, will you do evil for evil to your neighbor. To the Lord will you give (the right) to punish the insult (done) by them. And they are your brothers and your fathers, Israel’s line, and they fled far from your presence. Anyway, grant them pardon.” (28:14)⁴⁴

In this setting of conflict among Jewish brothers the central admonition is against doing evil for evil (as it is in 23:9; 28:6; 29:3). Here, it is connected with granting pardon (as it is in Pauline element no. 2). The right to punish the insult (the right of vengeance) must be given to the Lord (no. 6). All of

⁴² See M. Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen* (OBO 26; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) 236-302; W. T. Wilson, *The Mysteries of Righteousness: The Literary Composition and Genre of the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (TSAJ 40; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994) 91-103.

⁴³ C. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” *OTP*, 2.187.

⁴⁴ Burchard’s translation, *OTP*, 2. 246.

this amounts to an injunction against personal vengeance (no. 5). There is no mention of doing good, but doing good is certainly the flip side of not killing, and it is intimated by “pardon.”⁴⁵ Aseneth is also said to “speak good (things) on behalf of her enemies” (28:12). Harmony is not mentioned explicitly, but when Aseneth says, “they are your brothers and your fathers, Israel’s line,” she may be suggesting that harmony is to be desired rather than anger.⁴⁶ In fairness, it should also be noted that nonretaliation is likewise urged against Gentile enemies in this writing, though with certain exceptions (23:13-14) and not with the elements we are tracing.⁴⁷

C. The Six Pauline Elements in the Jewish Texts

The distribution of our Pauline passage’s six thematic elements in the Jewish works examined above can be seen in table 1.

Table 1 Thematic Elements of Romans 12:14-21
in Intertestamental Jewish Texts

Intertestamental Jewish Text	Pauline Thematic Element ^a					
	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4	No. 5	No. 6
<i>Damascus Document</i> 9.2-5		X			X	X
<i>Manual of Discipline</i> 10.17-18	X	X	*		x	X
Slavonic <i>Enoch</i> 50:3-4	*	X			x	X
<i>Testimony of Gad</i> chaps. 6-7	X	X	X	?	x	X
<i>Pseudo-Phocylides</i> lines 76-78	X	X	x		x	X
<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i> 28:10,14	*	X	?		x	X

^a X = explicitly mentioned; x = implied; ? = possible but uncertain;
* = in surrounding context.

With the possible exception of *Ps. Phoc.* 77, each of the passages examined is concerned with the proper response in situations of conflict within the

⁴⁵ Compare 29:4, a passage exhibiting numerous traits of our tradition, in which the wounded party is urged to do good to the offender; if the offender lives, “he will be our friend after this.”

⁴⁶ See also the words on the impropriety of “anger” in 23:9.

⁴⁷ Compare 23:7-9,12; 28:7; 29:3-4. One further text, Sir 27:30-28:11, revolves around the proper reaction to an injury done by one’s “neighbor” (28:2). Vengeance (element no. 5) is specifically proscribed (28:1), but the other elements are rather more implied than explicitly stated in the form we are seeking, and the crucial element no. 6 (the divine prerogative) is conspicuously absent. Zerbe (*Non-Retaliation*, 44) remarks on Sirach’s attitude, “In relation to neighbors and friends Sirach promotes forgiveness, kind deeds and rejection of vengeance in response to wrongs. But in relation to enemies and sinners, the pursuit of vengeance is legitimized.”

community, particularly in cases of members tempted to hatred and retaliation because they perceive themselves to have been wronged by another member. In such settings, a traditional response appears to have developed in the last two centuries of the pre-Christian era. This response proscribes personal retribution (no. 2) and grounds it in the divine prerogative of vengeance (no. 6). Paul's injunction against avenging oneself (no. 5) is not usually an explicit element in the Jewish texts studied, but it is obviously implied by the exhortation to "leave vengeance to God," which may be considered more or less equivalent to the injunction against retribution. Paul's use of "curse not" is not found in the Jewish texts, but it could easily have entered the tradition at any point as the opposite of "bless your adversary." The phrase, "do not repay evil for evil," is almost certainly a traditional maxim within this setting.⁴⁸ In most instances this traditional response also moves beyond passive waiting for God's vengeance and urges doing good to one's adversary (thematic element no. 1). This can be motivated by hope that the enemy might repent, by expectation of reward, or by fear of worse consequences, even of divine judgment, but it appears to be motivated mainly by the fact that it is commanded in the Torah (Lev 19:17-18). Members of the community are to do their utmost to maintain genuine love, solidarity, and peace in the community of faith (theme no. 3). In *T Gad* 7:1, a negatively phrased idea not so distant from Paul's "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" is found, but without his warnings against a haughty attitude. Human wrath and hatred, on the other hand, especially if they are concealed, are to have no part in dealings between brethren, nor is anything that might cause another to be despised. Theme no. 4 ("consider what is noble in the sight of all") does not appear to have been a part of this Jewish tradition, and we will have to seek elsewhere to explain its insertion in Rom 12:17.

In addition to these main thematic elements we have discovered several others pertinent to the interpretation of Romans 12. Universal language ("all," "everyone," and so on) can be used, but with reference to the limited sphere of one's own sect or nation. Furthermore, in such settings of conflict within the community itself the offending party can be labeled an enemy. Also, with the rise of apocalyptic eschatology it became possible to conceive of God's vengeance striking one's (unrepentant) adversaries at the final "day of great judgment." In two of the texts we have examined there is language reminiscent of Paul's unusual "give place to (the) wrath" (Rom 12:19).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Compare Prov 20 22, 24 29, 1QS 10 17, 2 *Enoch* 50 4, *Joseph and Aseneth* 23 3,9, 28 5, (28 10,14), Rom 12 19, 1 Thess 5 15 See Dunn, *Romans* 9-16, 747, and Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 87

⁴⁹ In *T Gad* 6 7 (see n 38), and *Joseph and Aseneth* 29 14 (τῷ κυρίῳ δώσεις ἐκδικήσῃν τὴν ὀβρίν αὐτῶν) See Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 86

Though our focus is on Rom 12:14-21, not a few elements of Rom 12:9-13 have also been noted in these Jewish texts. These include genuine love (v. 9), avoidance of sin (v. 9), honor (v. 10), endurance (v. 12), prayer (v. 12), and meeting the needs of the saints (v. 13). In spite of these links, however, we found no regularly occurring combination of these elements to suggest that Rom 12:9-13 is likewise modeled upon a pre-existing Jewish tradition.

III. Romans 12:14-21, a Typical Response to Conflict within the Community

In this section we will try to demonstrate that our understanding of Rom 12:14-21 well suits the larger literary and social-historical context of the passage, and to elucidate the comparison with the Jewish tradition sketched above. We will also try to answer possible objections raised against interpreting τοὺς διώκοντας as community insiders.

A. The Literary Context Pointing to Conflict within the Community

Increasingly the coherence of Romans 1-15 as rhetorical argument is being recognized.⁵⁰ Thus, 12:1-15:13, according to Jewett, “are the climactic proof of the main thesis,” not merely a secondary application or ethical appendage, and they are tied closely to what precedes by numerous thematic links.⁵¹ Furthermore, this *exhortatio* shows evidence of being a carefully sculpted argument rather than a loose collection of varied paraenetic subjects: the whole is bracketed by reference to God’s mercy (12:1; 15:9) and is sustained by the call for a “renewal of the mind,” for a new attitude toward one another.⁵² The initial exhortation, Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς . . . μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός (12:1-2), is reiterated and specified at the conclusion, ὁ δὲ Θεὸς . . . τῆς παρακλήσεως δόξῃ ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν (15:5). In addition, the many links between 12:1-21 and 14:1-15:13 suggest strongly that the somewhat more general chap. 12 functions as the theoretical foundation for the more specific exhortations in chaps. 14-15.⁵³

⁵⁰ See W. Wuellner, “Paul’s Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans: An Alternative to the Donfried-Karris Debate over Romans,” *CBQ* 38 (1976) 348.

⁵¹ R. Jewett, “Following the Argument of Romans,” *The Romans Debate* (ed. Donfried), 272. See also Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 706. On the other hand, W. Schmithals (*Der Römerbrief: Ein Kommentar* [Gütersloh: Mohn, 1988] 417-24) thinks that chaps. 1-11 and 12-15 are two separate letters.

⁵² Rom 12:2,3,16; 13:8-10; 14:1,10,13; 15:1-2,5,7.

⁵³ Consider, for instance, the stress on “one another” (12:5,10[twice],16; 13:8; 14:13,19; 15:5,7), serving the Lord or Christ (12:11; 14:18), honoring each other (12:10, [13:7]) rather than

If this is so, we should look closely at the social-historical setting of chaps. 14–15 in order to understand chap. 12 better.

The opinion that chaps. 14–15 do not reflect the situation of Paul's readers in Rome is increasingly being rejected as various scholars reconstruct the exact setting in the Roman house churches.⁵⁴ Ostensibly the issue between the opposing groups revolves around the question whether or not a fellow Christian should eat meat.⁵⁵ For Paul, however, a more fundamental issue is the threat thus posed to the maintenance of love and to the peace or unity of the church in Rome.⁵⁶ The "strong" and the "weak" are failing to "accept one another,"⁵⁷ despising, judging, even condemning each other instead.⁵⁸ A sustained argument against such mutual judgment (14:1–13a) is followed by an appeal to avoid causing others to stumble or be destroyed (14:13b–23) and an appeal to the strong to carry other people's weaknesses (15:1–6). This is followed by 15:7–13, a conclusion to the entire paraenetic section (12:1–15:6) in which both Roman groups are encouraged to accept one another in fulfillment of the scriptural vision of Jew and Gentile glorifying God together in the one people of God. In this situation of intracommunitarian conflict, chap. 12 is Paul's more general hortatory introduction to the specific paraenesis of chaps. 14–15.⁵⁹

Confirmation of this can be had by examining the structure of chap. 12. Wilson explores the structure of this chapter along the lines of other Jewish sapiential discourses and convincingly overturns a widely held perception of this section as an unstructured collection of maxims loosely strung together.⁶⁰

despising others (14:3,10). The Romans should focus on what is pleasing to God (12:1,2), and their not thinking too highly of themselves (to others' detriment, 12:3,16) leads to their pleasing others (14:18; 15:1–3). "No vengeance" (12:19) is echoed in "no judgment" (14:3–5,10,13). Use of the metaphor of the body (12:4–8, normally associated with οἰκοδομεῖν in Paul) leads to building up one another (14:19; 15:2). "Love" (12:9–10; 13:8–10; 14:15) is linked to "peace" (12:18; 14:17,19; 15:13). The pursuit of hospitality and peace (διώκειν, 12:13; 14:19) replaces "persecution" of one another (12:14). "In einzelnen Passagen blickt dieser Abschnitt auf die spezielle Paränese in 14,1–15,7 voraus und bereitet sie vor" (Schmithals, *Römerbrief*, 436; see also 322, 344–56).

⁵⁴ A convenient summary is given by Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 322–25. For a different view, see R. J. Karris, "Romans 14:1–15:13 and the Occasion of Romans," *The Romans Debate* (ed. Donfried), 75–99.

⁵⁵ See 14:2,5–6,14,20–23. The isolated references to "observing sacred days" (14:5–6) and "abstaining from wine" (14:17,21) may reflect subsidiary problems in Rome, or they may be supporting arguments brought in by Paul, perhaps from his own experience.

⁵⁶ See 14:15,17–18,19–20a; 15:1–3,5–6,7–13.

⁵⁷ Προσλαμβάνειν (14:1,3; 15:7), to welcome someone as a true member of the household of God.

⁵⁸ See 14:1b,3,4,10,13.

⁵⁹ See n. 53 above for verbal links.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, esp. pp. 126–47. See also Black, "Pauline Love Command," 3–22.

Verses 1-2 are the *programmatic introduction* to the foundation of Paul's ethics.⁶¹ The Romans are not given a new legal code of ethics or a reiteration of the OT code but are called to a new form of worship which encompasses all of life, including corporeal existence, and which requires a transforming renewal of the mind, all grounded in God's gracious justifying work through Christ. Paul's concern for corporate unity lies just below the surface at this point.⁶²

Verses 3-8 constitute a *descriptive section* designed to "establish and depict some model of ethical behavior pertinent to the special concepts and concerns stated in the programmatic statement."⁶³ It provides a model of corporate identity and purpose (the church as the body of Christ), the social context for establishing Christian ethical priorities.

Verses 9-21 constitute a single *prescriptive section* with the typical resumption of direct address, teaching, exhortation, and encouragement, in which wisdom admonitions predominate. In it we find "certain concrete ethical strategies and specific patterns of behavior that derive from the general plan that had been announced in the programmatic statement and illustrated in the descriptive model."⁶⁴ In this case all revolves around the exhortation to make genuine love the essential principle governing relationships (v. 9), with direct applicability to the situation of conflict in chaps. 14-15. Within vv. 9-21 the syntax and style suggest that a minor break is intended between v. 13 and v. 14;⁶⁵ yet it is important to stress that both vv. 9-13 and vv. 14-21 follow equally from the statement of the thesis on ἀγάπη in v. 9a.⁶⁶ The rest of 12:9-13 is a direct appeal, with a list of consequences flowing from that initial statement of the thesis on ἀγάπη, and 12:14-21 is an exhortation based on ἀγάπη.

Nearly all commentators understand vv. 9-13 to refer to relations within the church. The governing appeal to love in v. 9 will reappear in 13:8-10 as

⁶¹ This introduction, according to Wilson (*Love without Pretense*, 93), "expresses the ethical objectives and didactic perspective of the entire passage in a short and striking manner. . . . Everything that follows in the remainder of the sapiential discourse will, in varying ways, serve to expand, explain, and motivate these basic ideas and objectives."

⁶² The joint offering of their *bodies* (plural) becomes the new living and holy *sacrifice* (singular) of the community. The "testing, approving, ascertaining" (δοκιμάζειν) of God's will (12:2) is probably the *corporate* formation of correct ethical judgments (see Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 714-15), and a contrast with the readers' tendency to ascertain God's will for others may be intended (cf. 14:22-23). In addition, Ortkemper (*Leben aus dem Glauben*, 26) suggests that for Paul εὐάρεστος τῷ Θεῷ (12:1) is a semitechnical expression referring to "menschliche Solidarität miteinander" and contrasting nicely with the displeasing intracommunitarian conflict of chaps. 14-15.

⁶³ Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 93; cf. 130.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 94; cf. 130.

⁶⁵ See, for example, the switch to imperatives and imperatival infinitives in vv. 14-15 following the long series of imperatival participles in vv. 9b-13.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 132.

the only obligation owed one another, and in 14:15 as the basis for not eating meat. It is the opposite of the Roman Christians' self-serving attitudes and behavior. The Jewish tradition of intracommunitarian nonretaliation regularly stressed the importance of maintaining solidarity and harmony with one's neighbor, after the pattern of Lev 19:17-18a, and it could likewise subsume the entire exhortation under the rubric of brotherly love,⁶⁷ though that was by no means the norm.⁶⁸ That Paul has the familial love of the Christian community in mind is confirmed by v. 10, with its specific "brotherly love"⁶⁹ and its double use of ἀλλήλους, and by v. 13, with its limitation to "the saints." Verses 9-13 conclude with the final obligation of genuine love, namely, to pursue hospitality (τὴν φιλοξενίαν διώκοντες).

B. The Persecutors: Insiders or Outsiders?

This brings us to the crucial text, v. 14: εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας,⁷⁰ εὐλογεῖτε καὶ μὴ καταρᾶσθε. Who are these "persecutors"? For most scholars, the mere presence of τοὺς διώκοντας is sufficient proof that vv. 14-21 deal with relations with outsiders. As Zerbe argues, "διώκειν in the sense of 'persecute' elsewhere in Paul and the New Testament refers only to hostility from outsiders, never from insiders."⁷¹ This, however, oversimplifies the actual situation. In the Gospels διώκειν can refer to persecution of Jews by other Jews,⁷² and to persecution of the disciples of Jesus (who were Jews!) by other Jews, even by those within one's own family or circle of friends.⁷³ This use of "persecute" to refer to intra-Jewish opponents has its roots in the Psalms which mention the righteous sufferer wronged and persecuted by other members of the community. This attitude has been compounded in the Gospels by rivalries among Jewish sects, including the movement surrounding Jesus as messiah. Likewise, Paul can use διώκειν in reference to the activities of Jewish(-Christian) opponents of his gospel.⁷⁴ "Insider-outsider" distinctions become somewhat blurred in the context of Jewish sectarianism, where the central question is precisely Who belongs to the in-group? To other Jews and Jewish-Christians, Paul's "outsider" opponents may have been solidly "inside."

⁶⁷ See *T. Gad* 6-7 (section II.B.4 above).

⁶⁸ Although subsumption of the ethics of nonretaliation under "genuine love" may have been suggested to Paul by Lev 19:17 or the Jewish tradition studied above, we consider it more likely that it was his gospel which elevated love to this premier position (see section IV below).

⁶⁹ Compare 1 Thess 4:9; also Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22.

⁷⁰ Omitting ὑμᾶς, see n. 11.

⁷¹ Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 227. See further A. Oepke, "διώκω," *TDNT*, 2. 229-30.

⁷² Matt 5:12; 23:34; Luke 11:49.

⁷³ Matt 5:10-12; 10:16-23; Luke 21:12-19.

⁷⁴ Gal 4:29; 5:11; 1 Thess 2:15. The same thought appears in 2 Cor 11:24 and 2 Thess 3:1-3, though διώκειν is not used.

Thus, διώκειν alone cannot be a clue to the identity of these “persecutors.” At most, it alerts us to a situation of enmity producing hostile actions by one person or group toward another. As we noted above, the epistle gives no indication of active persecution by governmental authorities or by non-believers outside the Roman house churches. On the other hand, in Romans 14–15 there is considerable evidence of serious conflict between the “weak” and the “strong,” leading to their mutual despising and rejection, which Paul says can “injure,” “ruin,” and even “destroy.”⁷⁵ Paul himself does not wish to label any of the parties to this dispute “persecutors,” but his use of τοὺς διώκοντας accurately reflects the perceptions and feelings of those subject to the disdain and injury of the others. He does not condone this enmity; in fact, he will vigorously attack it in chaps. 14–15.⁷⁶ Paul has taken a paraenetic topos broadly applicable in early Christian tradition (to bless one’s persecutors) and applied it to the form of persecution at the hands of fellow believers being experienced in Rome.

We suggest that this strong expression τοὺς διώκοντας appears less surprising when the wordplay with “*pursuing* hospitality” (12:13) is given due consideration. Paul’s use of διώκειν in the sense of “pursue (something)” rather than “persecute (someone)” is unexceptional.⁷⁷ This terminology crops up once again in 14:19, “Let us then pursue (διώκωμεν) what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” There, such “pursuit” is explicitly contrasted with “destroying the work of God” and “making others fall by what you eat” (14:20). We also noted the use of “pursue, persecute” (Hebrew דרר) in 1QS 10.17–18 (one should “pursue” one’s injurer with good).⁷⁸ Paul’s immediately ensuing use of the same word (bless τοὺς διώκοντας, 12:14) allows a play on words involving the former “pursuit” and the latter.

⁷⁵ Although enemies do appear in 16:17–20, it is unlikely that Paul has them in mind in 12:14–21. Those in chap. 16 are genuine “opponents to the teaching” and are to be “avoided,” whereas in chap. 12 Paul enjoins blessing one’s perceived enemies, doing good to them, and living peaceably with them.

⁷⁶ Thus, we need not dispute the fact that the idea of blessing persecutors generally suggested persecution by nonbelievers (1 Cor 4:12; Luke 6:28; 1 Pet 3:9?), or the fact that Paul would not normally label other believers “enemies” (2 Thess 3:15, assuming Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians).

⁷⁷ Compare Rom 9:30,31 (righteousness); 1 Cor 14:1 (love); 1 Thess 5:15 (what is good); also 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11. Paul did have other alternatives for expressing this thought. He could equally well have chosen ζητεῖν. He could also conceivably have expressed the same idea (pursuit of a good) with ποιῆσαι, or εἶναι, or negatively with μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι. From 1 Pet 3:11 it is clear that ζητεῖν and διώκειν were more or less synonymous in such contexts. See *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; ed. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 1. 662–64. It is possible that the apostle chose διώκειν in this situation *because* he intended immediately thereafter to speak of persecution.

⁷⁸ See n. 26.

Though we have no explicit evidence in Romans 14–15 that the groups considered one another “persecutors,” their destructive and judgmental behavior toward one another would quite understandably have led them to such a view. The use of the language of enmity may also have been suggested to Paul’s mind by the Jewish tradition of nonretaliation which he is about to take up. In that tradition, people *within* the community could be spoken of as “adversaries” and “enemies,” as we have seen. Paul’s urging them to “welcome” or “accept” one another instead of “despising” one another testifies to the depth of the rejection. A comparison with modern rivalries and animosities among Christian groups and the readiness of one group to consider the others their “enemies” only serves to confirm this universal reality of religious conflict.

Just as the verb διώκειν does not demand the restriction of its agent to persons outside the community, the seemingly universal language in Rom 12:17–21 does not demand a reference to outsiders in v. 14. In v. 17 the reader is exhorted to “take thought for that which is noble in the sight of all people.” This contains an echo of Prov 3:4, but in place of the OT focus on the will of God and on Jewish morals Paul focuses attention on what was commonly regarded as good or noble in Greco-Roman society.⁷⁹ The thought that Christian ethics and behavior must take into account the watching world was not uncommon.⁸⁰ In this case, Paul uses the idea as a supporting argument for the primary exhortation in v. 17a (“Repay no one evil for evil”). This too was a common Jewish maxim which became part of Christian paraenesis.⁸¹ That this maxim had application to the Christian community for Paul, as well as to the broader society is shown by 1 Thess 5:15. Its place in Jewish texts proscribing retaliation against fellow community members has been demonstrated above. Thus, Rom 12:17a forbids retaliation against other members of the Roman house churches, and 12:17b gives further support by reminding the readers of the effects such ignoble actions would have on outsiders.

Verse 18 (“If possible, as far as it is within your power, be at peace with all people”) is likewise a Jewish maxim,⁸² but it was equally at home in Greco-Roman ethical instruction,⁸³ and it was taken up into Christian paraenesis.⁸⁴ Living at peace with others in a generally hostile society was of obvious

⁷⁹ This is seen in the omission of “in the Lord’s sight” in Rom 12:17 and the addition of πάντων before ἀνθρώπων. Cf. 2 Cor 9:21.

⁸⁰ Compare Rom 14:16,18; 2 Cor 4:21; 8:21; 1 Tim 3:7.

⁸¹ See n. 48.

⁸² Compare Sir 6:6; Ps 34:14.

⁸³ Arrian *Epict. Diss.* 4.5.24.

⁸⁴ Mark 9:50; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thess 5:13, which have a clear intracommunitarian focus; also Matt 5:9; Heb 12:14.

importance in early Christian ethics. The context of the present passage, however, suggests that Paul has cited this common maxim about having peace with *all* persons (including outsiders) in order to make a point against the hindrances to peace now evident in the Roman congregation, especially the members' haughty attitudes toward one another (12:16). Thus, he will specifically focus on "one another" when he again exhorts to the pursuit of the things that make for peace (14:19).⁸⁵

One last objection to our interpretation of "persecutors" as those within the community might be based on the obscure reference to "heaping burning coals" upon the head of one's enemy in 12:20, a thought which at first glance does not appear to be readily applicable to fellow Christians. We interpret heaping coals upon the head as a means of shaming an enemy in order to lead him or her to repentance, a symbolic action perhaps reminiscent of an Egyptian repentance ritual whose purpose is restorative.⁸⁶ Our reasons are primarily contextual. A prohibition of retaliation in v. 19, "Never avenge yourselves," is followed by two adversative directives, both introduced by ἀλλά, which expand the prohibition in different ways. The first, in v. 19b, commends giving place "to (the) wrath," which is immediately clarified: it means leaving vengeance to God, to whom alone the prerogative of retribution belongs. In this, Paul is echoing the Jewish tradition traced above.⁸⁷ In none of these texts do we read "thereby you will be avenged"; the point in all of them is that vengeance is God's alone, and that humans therefore, should refrain from seeking their own.⁸⁸ The second adversative directive expanding the prohibition of private vengeance is in v. 20: rather than taking vengeance, one is to perform acts of kindness toward an enemy.

In the Jewish tradition of nonretaliation traced above doing good to one's enemy (within the faith community) was also advised. In the larger context of Rom 12:9-21 this forms one aspect of genuine love (v. 9) and reiterates the introductory command to bless one's persecutors rather than cursing them (a form of vengeance). It also forms the counterpart to "repaying evil

⁸⁵ Wilson (*Love without Pretense*, 176) makes this exhortation to peace the fulcrum of a ring composition encompassing vv. 14-21. If his structural analysis is correct, this is one more indication that the issue of peace among brethren in conflict is at the heart of Paul's concern in this passage.

⁸⁶ The literature on this notoriously problematic text continues to grow. Besides the commentaries, see especially W. Klassen, "Coals of Fire: Sign of Repentance or Revenge?" *NTS* 9 (1962-63) 337-50; Ortkemper, *Leben aus dem Glauben*, 119-23; Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love," 343-55; Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 195-96; Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 249-61.

⁸⁷ There is even verbal similarity to *T. Gad* 6:7; see n. 38 above. Cf. also *Joseph and Aseneth* 28:14 (with Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 86 n. 95).

⁸⁸ That self-seeking motives are to be excluded is perhaps suggested by Paul's omission of the concluding "and the Lord will reward you" from the quotation of Proverbs 25 in Rom 12:20.

for evil" (v. 17). The concluding maxim in v. 21 summarizes all of the above by commending the conquering of evil by good. Evil would win out if revenge were sought against the offending party, but doing good to the offender carries the promise of the victory of good over evil, presumably in the form of restored harmony.⁸⁹

Let us now summarize our understanding of this passage. On our reading of 12:14 as a reference to persecutors *inside the community*, vv. 15-16 fit smoothly into the argument of vv. 9-21 read against the background of conflict in the community evident in chaps. 14-15.⁹⁰ The statement of the basic theme, genuine love (v. 9), is followed by ten resulting obligations (vv. 10-13), traditional and somewhat general in character but nevertheless directly applicable to the unloving attitudes and behavior of the community's members. Beginning with v. 14 attention is focused more directly upon the situation of enmity within the Roman church by the use of the term "persecutors."⁹¹ Genuine love for these persecutors must evidence itself by blessing rather than cursing. Blessing one's persecutors means rejoicing with them if they are happy, and weeping with them if they sorrow (v. 15). It also means maintaining an attitude of mutual harmony and equanimity, the opposite of haughtiness (v. 16). Furthermore, it means refraining from repaying evil for evil, from taking personal vengeance, since this belongs to God alone (vv. 17-21). Only so can genuine love prevail and good conquer evil within the community.

IV. Conclusion

Romans 12:14-21 does not address the question of relations with those outside the Christian community; it is concerned with the proper response of genuine love in the face of enmity and even of hostile actions ("persecution") within the fellowship of believers. Those who do not recognize this but hold

⁸⁹ "This injunction corresponds perfectly to the situation which constituted the acute problem in Rome and to the action whereby the unity of the brethren might be established" (Black, "Pauline Love Command," 13).

⁹⁰ What is said in 13:1-7 about relating to powers outside the church ("governing authorities") might seem to go against this understanding. However, the fact that the relation of this section to its immediately surrounding literary context is notoriously difficult weakens any objection on this basis (see S. E. Porter, "Romans 13:1-7 as Pauline Political Rhetoric," *Filología neotestamentaria* 3 [1990] 115-19). In spite of the focus on external authorities, it has been suggested that the impetus for including the instructions of 13:1-7 in the epistle ultimately lies in an internal conflict over paying taxes (vv. 6-7) which "threatened to split the Christian communities" (J. Mosier, "Rethinking Romans 12-15," *NTS* 36 [1990] 577). If so, the reason for resuming chap. 12's love theme in 13:8-10 is also easier to grasp.

⁹¹ According to Wilson (*Love without Pretense*, 173), v. 14 is Paul's "central statement" of vv. 9-21, being "the most visible, intense sort of manifestation of the ἀγάπη he hopes to instill in his audience."

the traditional interpretation must view vv. 15-16 as a sort of inexplicable interruption in Paul's argument, hardly a satisfying exegetical solution.⁹² Our reading recognizes a smooth and recognizable flow of rhetoric throughout chap. 12. It also sets the chapter firmly within the social-historical context of the Roman house churches and within the literary context of chaps. 12-15 as a whole. The existence of a Jewish tradition of nonretaliation in situations of intra-Jewish conflict, utilizing the same thematic elements found in Rom 12:14-21, suggests strongly that Paul's argument and language are best understood as a traditional response to conflict within the community, especially since it was at this stage of development (that is, in postbiblical Judaism) that the prohibition of retaliation within the community was first connected explicitly with the divine prerogative of vengeance.⁹³

Romans 12:14-21 is often cited as the chief evidence of Paul's universalistic love ethic. What does our reading imply for a Pauline ethic of love and nonretaliation toward those who are truly outside the Christian community? Appeal is frequently made to the Synoptic command "love your enemies," but Paul does not allude to that tradition in Romans 12. Nor is the question of priority settled in this regard.⁹⁴ Some commentators, stating that Paul subsumes the treatment of both believers and outsiders under the one topic love, stress the indivisible character of genuine Christian love (something akin perhaps to *Mitmenschlichkeit*), or they speak of that ultimate love which extends even beyond "love of the brethren."⁹⁵ As we read the text, such applications are all beside the point, for this text deals exclusively with love within the community of faith. While it cannot be said that Paul never commands love for all people (cf. 1 Thess 3:12), never enjoins doing good to all (cf. Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Cor 4:12), it appears now that love and nonretaliation toward those outside the Christian community were not major topics in the apostle's recorded ethical instruction.⁹⁶

This text becomes instead a fascinating window allowing us to see an ecclesiastical reality where not merely disputes but even enmity and persecution (at least in the minds of the victims) are not unthinkable. This window

⁹² A further caution against the traditional reading of vv. 14-21 can be voiced on grounds that it makes this passage fairly unique in the Pauline corpus. Wilson (*Love without Pretense*, 172) remarks that, apart from the "general statements" in 1 Cor 4:12; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12; 5:15; Rom 12:14-21 is "the only place where Paul extends the discussion of love to those outside the Christian community," and that it is also "the only passage in which Paul calls on Christians to respond positively to enemies."

⁹³ I. Broer, "Das Ius Talionis im Neuen Testament," *NTS* 40 (1994) 2-11.

⁹⁴ Piper (*Love Your Enemies*) thinks that Paul relies on Jesus. J. Sauer ("Traditionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu den synoptischen und paulinischen Aussagen über Feindesliebe und Wiedervergeltungsverzicht," *ZNW* 76 [1985] 1-28) thinks that the command was first Paul's.

⁹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (TynNTC 6; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 228; Wilckens, *Brief an die Römer*, 3. 22; Wilson, *Love without Pretense*, 172.

⁹⁶ The whole question of Paul's attitude toward outsiders deserves renewed attention, since constructions of a Pauline universal love ethic have usually relied heavily on Rom 12:14-21.

reveals equally, however, the authentically Christian response of genuine love and nonretaliation in such explosive circumstances a love which can only spring from the renewal of thought and mind introduced by God's grace in Christ. Here the persecuted weep with their persecutors, banish all thoughts of personal revenge and desire only God's blessing upon them. Although the love motif was already present in Lev 19:17-18 and is found occasionally in Jewish texts, to place at the foundation of such intracommunitarian nonretaliation that love which springs from renewal by God's grace appears to be a uniquely Christian, and specifically Pauline, contribution.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ One wonders indeed to what extent the implications of this radical call to bless the persecutors (within the church!) have been worked out in twentieth-century church life.