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Abstract

Addressing the internal conflict between the "weak" and the "strong" affecting the church of Rome, Paul attempts to provide a solution to the problem that is consistent with "his gospel." Central to Paul's argument is his quotation, in Romans 15:3, of Psalm 69:9 (LXX 68:10), which he interprets and presents here from a Christological perspective: Jesus appears as the one upon whom fall the offenses and insults addressed by some people to God. First, Paul reads that text typologically, as referring to Christ, the sin-bearer. Second, but equally important, Paul reads it as a paradigm of his own experience and as a *typos* of the experience of the church. The offenses between Christians are equated with casting blame upon God himself, and the shame associated with this blame is in turn extended to all those who claim to love and serve God. Paul's admonition to the "strong"—to endure criticism and to forego any reactive attempt to vindicate their honor—must have been perceived as unnatural behavior for those who belonged to a culture permeated with shame and honor values. Nevertheless, Paul encourages his fellow believers in Rome to accept shame as a sacrifice for the sake of a higher good, i. e., the upbuilding and edification of the Christian community.

Key words: Psalm 69, Romans 15, Conflict between strong and weak, Shame and honor, Paul's stance on Christian Sacrifice, Christological and typological reading of Psalms, cursing/blaming God

This study discusses Paul's strategy and the underlying theological themes in his usage of Psalm 69:9 in Romans 15:1–6. After acknowledging Romans 14–15 not merely as an appendix to Paul's theological discourse in the preceding chapters, but rather as a practical application of his theology in ethical terms, I will briefly expound on Paul's use of the OT, and specifically Psalm 69, in his letters by providing an analysis of Psalm 69 and Romans 15:3, and a reading of this passage in the light of Paul's theology of sacrifice.

Romans 12–15 and Its Relationship to the Rest of the Letter

The Letter to the Romans has always proven a fascinating and, in some aspects, a puzzling journey for NT scholars. Scholars are divided on the primary purpose of the letter: is it a theological tractate, that is, Paul's final articulation of his gospel? Does it stem from a concrete situation in the Roman church? Is it a sort of letter of introduction whose goal was to reassure the Romans about Paul's orthodoxy and convince them to provide him with the necessary support to continue his missionary journeys? This question is of great

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importance, since its answer gives us the hermeneutical key to understanding the discussion in chapters 14–15. Surely it would be a mistake to consider chapters 1–8 the most relevant ones, relegating chapters 9–11 to the status of a "personal excursus," and chapters 12–15 to that of an incidental discussion on practical matters only loosely connected with the preceding chapters.

While writing a pastoral letter, Paul seems to be very clear about his request for assistance in carrying out his mission, i.e., to be the Apostle of the Gentiles (Rom 1:13; 11:13–15, 25–26; 15:18–24). His ministry is justified by "his gospel," which he explains in detail in his long letter, showing its practical implications, that is, reconciliation and unity in one body despite differences (hence chapters 12–15). The section starting with chapter 12 is well connected to the preceding chapters, and even a development of previous theological assertions. This is evidenced by the fact that 12:1–2 clearly points back to 1:18–31: a discussion on the need for a total transformation of the corrupted body and mind (Olbricht & Sumney: 95). Moreover, 13:8–10 ("he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law . . . therefore love is the fulfilling of the law) seems to be intimately connected with 8:4 ("in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us"): the love for the *other* ("neighbor" in 15:2) and the resultant unity in the church are the fulfillment of the Law (Fitzmyer: 197). According to Dunn (1988: 705), Paul has "redrawn the boundaries of the people of God" in the first eleven chapters of Romans, making it clear that there is only one God (3:29) and one people (4:16; 9:8). Therefore chapters 12–15

> should not be regarded as a piece of standard parenesis which has no direct material or thematic connection with what has gone before and could have been discarded or wholly reordered without loss. . . . The obedience called for is taken out of cultic context and cannot be reduced to written formulae (12:1–2). The corporate identity of the eschatological people of God is transposed from the category of ethnic Israel to that of the body of Christ, Paul naturally taking it for granted that inheritance of the promise will have communal and not merely individual expression. . . .

More specifically, chapters 14–15 can be understood as an attempt to practically show how the redrawn boundaries should supersede the old barriers built by conflicting social identities.

Introductory Remarks on Romans 15:1–6

Whatever the precise nature of the conflict described in chapters 14–15 is, we will focus on Paul's statements in 15:1–6 on the necessary coexistence of believers holding different convictions, and especially on the meaning and scope of the citation of Psalm 69 in Romans 15:3. We can safely say that, whatever the underlying conflict was, Paul's main concern is to promote unity, which is to be achieved through hope, and not necessarily through the cancellation of differences (15:4, 12–13). As Christ received the Gentiles and made them one people with Israel by becoming a servant of the circumcision (15:8–10), so Christians should strive to please their brothers in an effort to extend to them God's blessings and promote unity. This seems to be the heart of Paul's mission: it is not surprising then to find at the end of this chapter a renewed declaration of his purpose: "that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (15:16; see also vv 20, 27). Thus, the question we will try to address is as follows: How and why is it necessary for the Christians in Rome, and everywhere else, to foster fellowship and promote unity to be acceptable to God, approved by men, and "corporatively" (Peterson: 36) experience righteousness, joy, and peace (Rom 14:17–18)? Turning first to Romans 15:1–6, we need to keep in mind two important facts: first, the whole section 12–15 seems to be built within the framework of sacrificial/priestly imagery (*thusian . . . latreian*, 12:1; *leitourgon . . . hierourgounta . . . prosphora*, 15:16); secondly, the subsection 14–15 is, in turn, particularly interested in the "weak" (14:1 and 15:1). We will come back to the implications of those elements in the understanding of Romans 15:3.

From the viewpoint of textual criticism, the only relevant variant for our study appears in verse 2, where instead of *hekastos gar hemōn* ("for each of us"), which is well attested, some manuscripts (e.g., D1, F, G, P, 048, very likely influenced by the Byzantine text-type) give the reading *hekastos gar ymōn* ("for each of you [pl.]"). Jewett (874) attempts to explain this variant as "an effort to avoid a contradiction with Paul's identification of himself only with the 'strong' in the preceding verse" or even by considering it a scribal effort to "augment Paul's authority." However, the textual evidence leaves no room for discussion. In light of the context of Romans 15:1–6, it is intriguing that a scribe might have

seen Paul identifying himself with the strong *and* the weak in the same pericope.

As for the limits of the pericope, vv 1–2 naturally mark the beginning by operating a shift from a general theological assertion to a more practical (ethical) declaration, while the prayer in vv 5–6 contains liturgical features that mark the end of the pericope (Dunn 1988: 835–36; for other examples of the expression "(Our) Lord Jesus Christ" as a marker between sections see 1:7; 5:11, 21; 6:11, 23; 7:25; 8:39; 13:14; 15:6). Verses 3–4 give the theological rationale of the injunction to please the neighbor and have a positive attitude toward the other using a text-proof (Ps 69:9) read with Christological lenses.

Paul's Use of the Old Testament and Psalm 69

Before addressing the citation of Psalm 69 in Romans 15:3, we will briefly look at Paul's use of the OT, of the Psalms in general, and of Psalm 69 in particular in his letters. Hays (155) has already shown that the Scriptures are for Paul a "vast network of typological prefigurations of himself and his communities" (see for instance Rom 10:14–17; 11:1–6; Gal 1:15; 4:21–5:1; 2 Cor 8:7–15). Hays (101), following Goppelt (127–28), is probably accurate in saying that Paul is not as concerned as Matthew, John, and Justin Martyr, for instance, in reflecting theologically on Jesus' identity through the use of veterotestamentarian proof-texts. However, texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and Romans 15:3 are important exceptions. These texts reveal that typology fully controls Paul's theology and reading of the OT: a Psalm (69) that Jews would naturally apply to David (*b. Zebaḥim* 54b) is read here as ultimately referring to Christ (Goppelt: 225; Hays: 105–11).

E. E. Ellis, in a study published in 1957 and reedited in 1981, counted thirty-one direct or indirect references to the Psalter in the Pauline epistles. The most quoted are the so-called lament psalms, which Paul references eleven times: Psalm 5 (Rom 3:13a); Psalm 10 (Rom 3:14); Psalm 14 (Rom 3:10–12); Psalm 22 (Rom 5:5); Psalm 36 (Rom 3:18); Psalm 51 (Rom 3:4c); Psalm 69 (Rom 11:9 and 15:3); Psalm 140 (Rom 3:13b), and Psalm 143 (Rom 3:20) (Harrisville: 168). Interestingly, according to Ellis (169), "Paul cites no complaints which refer to the psalmist's shame over his suffering, and makes no reference to those aspects of the complaint which inquire into the meaning or goal of suffering ('Why?' 'How long?')." Apparently, to Paul, Christian suffering had a very clear meaning (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10). Moreover, Paul uses Psalm 69 only when discussing Israel's destiny, the Christian experience, and the relationship between the apostle and his congregation (Ellis: 170).

Psalm 69 and Romans 15:3

Given the importance of Psalm 69 in the NT, it is perhaps not surprising to find a wealth of studies on this topic. Groenewald (2003: 62) pointed out that in Psalm 69:9b ("the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me") the supplicant "does not conceive of himself as deserving his present distress. Actually, the distress and insult he has to bear come as a direct result of his devotion to God and God's service." God is somehow insulted, and the dishonor is inevitably reversed on the one who is concerned about God and his house (v 9a). Christian de Vos and Gert Kwakkel (166) noticed that in the Psalter the word *bayit* often refers to the Jerusalemite Temple (cf. Pss 5:8; 27:4; 42:5; 65:5; 66:13; 84:11; 116:19; 122:1; 135:2; and also Jn 2:17). There is no clear reference to the Temple in Psalm 69, however; v 9 could very well refer more generally to God's dwelling place or household. De Vos and Kwakkel concluded that the petitioner might be advocating for a more tangible presence of God among his people, and that he

> has laboured as hard as he could for God's dwelling place or household. . . . But his fellow men do not appreciate this attitude and its corresponding behaviour. Quite the reverse: because of his zeal, they mock him so severely that he is about to succumb to their attacks.

Paul does read the Psalm typologically, that is, referring to Christ, but *also* as a paradigm of his own experience and that of his church. One wonders whether Paul did not see himself in this very position, striving to build up the people of God (cf. 15:2, *pros oikodomēn*), being attacked by his own brothers on the basis of his work for the gospel (cf. Rom 15:30–31). Moreover, Psalm 69:5b suggests that the petitioner is (unjustly, cf. vv 8, 10) accused of robbery or theft (de Vos & Kwakkel: 167): this would fit very well with Paul's complaint of not being considered "worthy" of the support reserved for the Apostles (cf. 1 Cor 9:1–10 and Rom 15:23).

In Romans 15:3 Paul cites verbatim Psalm 69:9b and assumes that Christ is the subject of the utterance. Since he does not feel the need to explain his hermeneutics, we can assume that such a Christological reading of the psalms was already accepted by his audience (Hays: 95, 102). The questions we ask are as follows: What does Paul mean by assuming that Christ utters those words? Who is the "you" to whom Christ is talking? How is this text relevant to Paul's argumentation in favor of unity and mutual acceptance? According to Paul, upon Christ fell "the reproaches [*oneidismoi*] of those who reproach you [*oneidizontōn*]." The verb *oneidizō* and its cognates refer to the semantic field associated with the concepts of reproach, shame, disgrace, and mockery (Spicq: 385–87). Typical examples are Mark 15:32 and Matthew 27:44, in which Jesus is insulted while hanging on the cross. In the LXX, *oneidizō* translates the Hebrew *hrf*, which in turn also has a wide range of meanings, but basically refers to reproach, mockery, insult, and cursing. Interestingly, in the LXX *oneidizō* is often associated with a declaration of war or conflict (1 Sam 17:10, 25, 26, 36, 45; 2 Sam 21:21; 23:9; 1 Chr 20:7; Sir 47:4; Zeph. 2:8; Psalm 42:11; 55:13; 74:10), with the dishonor of slavery—especially Jewish slavery in Egypt, and it is also an Israelite term for the period of slavery in Egypt and for all the defeats and dishonor suffered by the chosen people (Josh 5:9; Neh 1:3; 5:9; 1 Macc 4:58). If directed against God, the insult is equated with blasphemy (2 Kgs 19:4, 16, 22, 23; 2 Chr 32:17; Isa 37:4, 6, 17, 23, 24; cf. Ps 74:18; 79:12; 89:50–51; 102:8; Isa 55:7), and the dishonor and shame that the recipient suffers also affects those close to him (Jer 15:15; 20:8; Ps 69:7, 9), since the insult affects those close to the one insulted (Tob 3:10; Sir 41:7; 1 Macc 10:70; cf. Judg 8:15). The insult is shameful because it also implies scorn and derision (Neh 4:4; Tob 3:7; Ps 44:10–11; 69:20; 119:39; Isa 50:1; 54:4; Jer 15:9; 51:51. Cf. Luke 1:25; Ep. Arist 249; T. Reub. 6.3; Josephus, Ag. Apion 1.285; Sib. Or. 3.607; PSI 1337, 15). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews frequently uses the substantive *oneidismos*, referring to Christians who share in their Lord's shameful death (Heb 12:2) through the abuses and scorn they themselves endure (Heb 10:33) because of their faith (Heb 13:13; see also the Teacher of Righteousness' injunction to his followers in CD 4.11; 6.5; 7.13; 20.22, 27; 1QpHab 8.11–13; 9.5).

That Paul is addressing a suffering community can hardly be disputed (cf. Rom 8:17, 29; 12:12–21). Regarding the nature of the sufferings addressed in chapters 14–15, it seems very likely that they resulted from an internal struggle rather than problems with outsiders, since the whole discussion is between the "weak" and the "strong." Both parties were already part of the Roman church as believers (Rom 14:2–3), brothers (Rom 14:10), and therefore "neighbors" (15:2). This internal issue seems to be triggered by the "weakness" (Rom 15:1) of some who are over-concerned about days and foods (Rom 14:1, 6). The problem seems to be less the role and validity of those beliefs and practices than the insurmountable boundaries they create: the intransigent spirit of those who hold these beliefs is added to the boundaries created by the beliefs and practices. This seems to reveal a commitment not so much to the Law, but to the principle that sees unity attainable only by assimilation through the Law rather than by extension of grace by faith in Christ. That the problem here lies in the "attitude" more than in the "practices" themselves can be argued by the fact that, apparently, one could hold the position (practices) of the "weak" (Rom 14–15) without necessarily creating a problem: Paul seems to indicate that it is possible to do so when he says to receive the weak brother but not for disputes (14:1–3), and when he describes the "weak brother" who honors the day "to the Lord" and does not eat "to the Lord" (14:6).

In his appeal to accept one another (15:1–6), Paul inevitably refers to Jesus' sacrifice, a sacrifice whose salvific power (6:3) results in both freedom (Gal 5:1) and unity (Rom 15:7). Especially in Romans 15:3, Paul highlights the fact that "Jesus did not please himself"; as Jewett suggests (879), the aorist form can hardly be seen as a constative verb referring mainly to Jesus' earthly ministry (an imperfect would probably have been more appropriate), but it clearly harks back to Jesus' submission on the cross (cf. 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5–8; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14), which can be seen as the climax of his earlier ministry. In this regard, Dunn (1988: 838) sees in 14:13–18 and 15:1–2 "echoes of the Jesus tradition." Jesus suffered a shameful death, was covered with insults, and was victimized by mockery. He underwent that dishonor, not because he deserved it, but with a specific purpose in mind. Just as the petitioner in Psalm 69 is unjustly accused by his kinsfolk and enemies alike because of his zeal for God's household and is offended by the scorn addressed to "his" God, so Jesus was reproached, scorned, and put to shame on account of his efforts and of "his" God—not the God of the Jews alone, but the one God of Jews and Gentiles (Rom

14:14, 20; cf. Mark 7:15). It is precisely by this "sacrifice" that Jesus was able to extend salvation to the Gentiles and to found the one people of God (Gal 3:13–14). In Romans 15:3 ("the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me"), Jesus is addressing the Father, not the Christians (Käsemann: 382; Cranfield: 733; Dunn 1988: 839; Moo: 868; Hanson), since the undergirding theme of the section 12:1–15:13 is Jesus' sacrifice as paradigm of the Christian life. Paul is presenting the suffering of Jesus as a paradigm for obedience, emulation, and even participation: just as reproaches to Jesus' God fell on Jesus and made the gospel "alive" and accessible to all, so the contempt that the weak *receives* from the strong and vice versa (Rom 14:10; note that Romans 15:1 is all about "to bear") is in fact an attack against the one God that also falls on the Christians who are called to be a living sacrifice "in Jesus" with the same purpose: to build one body (*pros oikodomēn*, 15:2).

Paul makes it very clear that Jesus' sacrifice, to which nothing can be added, is the only way to salvation (Rom 3:25; 5:6–10, 19; 6:3–11; cf. Phil 2:8). Jesus had been "handed out" by God to justify us and give us everything with the Son (Rom 8:31–33). However, Jesus (and his sacrifice) is also a model, a *typos* for the Christian life: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the [life] which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Interestingly, Jesus' paradigmatic willingness to offer himself for a superior good is expressed, not only in Gal 2:20, but also in Romans 8:31–33, if we understand that in Romans Paul is actually alluding to Genesis 22, the sacrifice of Isaac. In the *targum* of Genesis 22, circulating already in the synagogues during the first century, the accent is shifted from Abraham to Isaac, who willingly submitted himself (Lémonon: 643–44). Paul's strong appeal to the Romans in Romans 13:3 is then an emulation of Christ's sacrifice, dictated by love in freedom.

To what extent should the Romans understand the invitation to "bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom 15:2) as related to Jesus' sacrifice?

Jesus' Sacrifice and Christian Sacrifice in Romans

According to Peterson (39), Paul makes clear that "[o]ur participation in the glory of Christ's resurrection is contingent on our sharing in his suffering (8:17)." This suffering is not necessarily persecution from the hand of outsiders—Paul wrote to the Roman Christians during the *Quinquennium Neronis*, that is, before Nero's persecution of Christians in 64 CE.; cf. positive outlook of the government in Romans 13:3—, but could very well refer to internal conflicts as well, as depicted in Romans 14–15. The whole section 12:1–15:13 begins with the colorful injunction to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (12:1). This sacrifice is somewhat related to "suffering" and "reason." Paul was very likely aware of the Stoic and Neopythagorean revulsion for bloody sacrifices, but I deem his outlook to be more akin to the Hellenistic Jewish views on the matter. While Philo critiqued the efficacy of bloody sacrifice and underscored the necessity of the pure rational spirit of the one who sacrifices (Philo, *On the Special Laws* 1.277, 287–93; *Life of Moses* 2.108), he also never critiqued the sacrifice itself (Peterson: 38; Roetzel: 414). Moreover, if we accept Paul's somewhat Pharisaic mindset, he would naturally extend the liturgy of sacrifice "beyond the sacrificial altar in the Temple to encircle street and home, kitchen and bed, shop and school, and field and sea." (Roetzel: 415).

Paul clearly preaches Jesus' sufficient sacrifice, but he does not refrain from talking about the Christian's sacrifice (12:1; 15:15–16). This sacrifice, which is an emulation of and participation in Jesus' sacrifice (without salvific effects), is characterized by "obedience" (15:16–18), a love for the persecutor (13:1–7), and the "bearing" of the reproaches of fellow Christians (15:1–3). In the specific case of Romans 15:1–6, Christians are required to receive and bear reproaches just as Jesus received them: as reproaches addressed to God that are necessary to endure for a higher good, that is, extending salvation and building God's household. On the one hand, Paul is simultaneously channeling the offenses between Christians to God (they are, after all, blaming God: "The reproaches of those who reproached you . . .") and extending such shame upon all those who claim to love and serve God (". . . fell on me"). On the other hand, Paul is promoting an unnatural behavior—for a culture based on shame-honor values—in the face of a real or perceived offense: the strong, who paradoxically are those being abused, offended and put to shame, must not respond by attempting to re-establish and re-affirm their honor. Instead, they should accept shame as a sacrificial act for the higher good, i.e., the building up of

the community.

Paul preaches a crucified Messiah, and as such, a shameful one. If the "weak" believes that he can claim any kind of superiority and nullify Jesus' unifying effort by keeping specific regulations, he considers the Law as a principle of righteousness based on human strength. As such, the strong believer is called to accept the weak's critique rather than attempt to change his mind in a sort of redemptive effort. The goal of this response is to quench any violent counter-attack that might undermine the already weak unity. At the same time, the strong believer is reminded that "when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6; cf. 15:1). Just as Christ died for the "powerless," so the strong is called to endure for the sake of the "weak." Further, the strong is in reality weak, and someone for whom Christ died.

The weakness of both the strong and the weak is modeled upon Christ's weakness: the demand to "bear" and undergo humiliation is not comparable to the glorious death of the eight hundred Pharisees crucified by Alexander Janneus. They were not deemed cursed by God, but were rather martyrs in righteousness (*b. Sotah* 47a; *Qiddushin* 66a). Christ, however, died not as a martyr, but as an accursed, stricken by shameful humiliation. It has already been noted that, for instance, in 4 Maccabbees 17:20–22 suffering is somehow "vicariously propitiatory," and that the targum of Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah. However in 4 Maccabbees the suffering and weakness of the people prepares the way for the messiah (the messiah is not described as suffering); likewise, it is the people of God who suffers (not the servant-messiah) in TgIsa 53, and it is the non-Jewish nations who are not esteemed. The same trend about a conquering, non-suffering servant-messiah is visible also in I Enoch, Baruch and 4 Ezra (McCartney: 8).

Paul's radical stance

> demanded belief in a Messiah who became totally and radically weak, who was radically humiliated; it demanded an acknowledgment that human weakness was so great that only God's power in resurrection now, before the time of judgment, could overcome it [McCartney: 11].

Paul is not new in boasting of his weakness (e.g., 2 Cor 11:23–25), but he tries to convince his audience that, whether one might consider himself strong or weak, all must acknowledge the need to please God in the same way that Christ did (15:3–4). Specifically, this is by enduring shame and reproach, and by suffering scorn and offense as a sacrifice to God and because of God, following the pattern of Jesus' sacrifice and knowing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18).

Conclusion

Regardless of the exact situation that prompted Paul's discussion on the relationship between the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans 14–15, the appeal to bridge the divisiveness between different parties is built and rooted on Jesus' willingness to undergo shame and suffering for our sake (15:3). This shame and suffering was addressed to his God, the one God of Jews and Gentiles alike, of the "strong" and the "weak," all of them *astheneis* ("without strength") in any case (Rom 5:6). Jesus' humiliation is therefore understood as his effort to welcome Gentiles and Jews to the same body, and as such, his example defines the Christian's behavior (15:7).

Paul's understanding of sacrifice, probably rooted in his pharisaic background, was reformulated in the light of the Gospel: while Jesus' death on the cross is all-sufficient, Christians are called to look at Christ as a model (*typos*) to imitate and with whom to participate in his redemptory efforts. Christ's death to redeem humanity and bring about reconciliation between human beings and God, and between Jews and Gentiles, is the hermeneutical key to understanding, among other OT texts, Psalm 69. Psalm 69 contains more than the simple "accomplished promise": in actuality, Christ's experience gives the impetus to read this text as a way to understand Christ's own experience and that of his church (Dupont-Roc: 67).

After his dramatic conversion, Paul continued to view himself as an *Israelite*, that is, a person "identified by (historic) relation to God and not by relation to other peoples, and [who], by doing so, could transcend (or embrace) the differences between nations" (Dunn 1999: 193). As a result, he promoted this new perception of personal identity among the Christians in Rome by concluding the section about the "weak" and the strong" with a prayer (15:5–6) portraying a unified community glorifying "with one mind and one mouth... the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Immediately after this prayerful wish, he juxtaposed a broader picture in which he visualized the overcoming of a larger issue: the op-

position between Jews and Gentiles (Rom 15:7–13).

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