

## ΕΞΩ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΥΧΗΣΙΝ: THE RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF PAUL'S BOASTING IN ROMANS 15:17

Elia Mesrico Abdi Kasih

rico.kasih@yonsei.ac.kr

Global Institute of Theology, Yonsei University, South Korea

### ABSTRACT

Paul's boasting in Romans 15:17 raises a question on how the act of boasting needs to be perceived within the Christian world. Generally, boasting is considered negative conduct, and thus one should refrain from doing such action. However, this paper argues that Paul's boasting in that verse has a positive significant rhetorical function correlated to gathering support for his plan of mission to the worlds beyond Rome. In support of this argument, it is instructive to identify the different attitudes towards boasting exhibited in the first century Greco-Roman world and the Jewish tradition during that era. Moreover, classical rhetoric is also an important key to open the door to a clearer understanding of why in Romans 15:17, Paul boldly states that he has the pride or the reason to boast in Christ Jesus.

**Keywords:** Rhetorical Criticism, Paul, Plutarch, Boasting, Self-praise

### INTRODUCTION

In Romans 15:17, we are confronted with Paul's statement showing a form of self-praising. In other words, in this verse, we find the act of Paul's boasting by saying, "I have, then, the pride in Christ Jesus on the things for God" (ἔχω οὖν [τὴν] καύχησιν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν). The issue of interpreting this verse is related to two factors. The first factor concerns the meaning of boasting itself, namely how Paul and his audience in Rome perceived such practice.<sup>1</sup> The people in

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of Paul's boasting has attracted various discussions. Some of the studies that need to be mentioned are listed here. Edwin A Judge, "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice," *Australian Biblical Review* 16.1-4 (1968): 37-50, who suggests to interpret Paul's boasting in 2 Cor. 10-13 as a parody toward the forms of self-praise that were used during Paul's time; Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus Und Die Sokratische Tradition: Eine Exegetische Untersuchung Zu Seiner "Apologie" 2 Korinther 10-13*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 45 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), who proposes to align Paul's apostolic defense in 2 Cor. 10-13 with Socratic *apologia*, where Paul's denial of defense and apology (2 Cor. 12:19) has the function of actually beginning an apologetic speech against the religious

his audience would have had two responses to the act of boasting. They would have perceived it as (1) an unacceptable conduct, which is deemed as a negative, or (2) an acceptable act, which could evoke positive responses. These possible responses raise a question regarding the cultural interpretation with which Paul's statement should be understood in the verse that is being questioned.

The second factor in interpreting this verse deals with the location of the verse within the rhetorical disposition of Romans. Following the analysis of the rhetorical disposition conducted by several scholars, Romans 15:14 could be discerned as the beginning of the *peroratio* of the letter.<sup>2</sup> However, there is still no consensus as to where the *peroratio* should end.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, I will limit this survey to the block of Romans 15:14-29 where Paul's boasting is directly related. The placing of

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fraud accusation that is made toward him; Christopher Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *New Testament Studies* 32.1 (1986): 1–30, who develops Judge's proposal by comparing Paul's boasting with the ancient rhetorical convention of comparison, self-praise, and irony; Jennifer A. Glancy, "Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23-25)," *Journal of Biblical Literature*.1 (2004): 99–135, who focuses more on the comparison of the value of war scars in the Greco-Roman world and Paul's boasting of his beatings; M. Wojciechowski, "Paul and Plutarch on Boasting," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 3 (2006): 99–109 who surveys the interface of Plutarch's view of self-praise with various Pauline texts on boasting; Kate C. Donahoe, "From Self-Praise to Self-Boasting: Paul's Unmasking of the Conflicting Rhetorico-Linguistic Phenomena in 1 Corinthians" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2008), who argues that Paul provides a new understanding of boasting to the Corinthians and thus casts their so called 'normal' self-praise practice into a negative light; Marcin Kowalski, *Transforming Boasting of Self into Boasting in the Lord: The Development of the Pauline Periautologia in 2 Cor 10–13*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham: UPA, 2013), who argues for the alignment of 2 Cor. 10-13 with Isocrates' *Antidosis* and rejects the parody theory; and P. B. Smit, "Paul, Plutarch and the Problematic Practice of Self-Praise (Περιαυθολογία): The Case of Phil 3.2-21," *NTS* 60.3 (2014): 341–59, who studies the interface of Paul's boasting in Phil. 3 with Plutarch's view of self-praise.

- 2 Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary on the Book of Romans*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 901–3. See also Wilhelm Wuellner, "Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans: An Alternative to the Donfried-Karris Debate over Roman," in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 136. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 350, 375–76. All three scholars mentioned here agree that the *peroratio* of Romans begins in 15:14.
- 3 Jewett and Wuellner take the *peroratio* until the end of chapter 16, while Witherington argues for a division with chapter 16 and takes the final chapter of the letter as a section promoting recommendation and reconciliation: "Thus, whether ch. 16 is originally part of the same physical document as chs. 1-15 is unimportant. It is addressed to the same audience and gives names to the Jewish Christians in Rome. This chapter asks the Gentile Christians to do so as well – to receive and honor and have fellowship with these Jewish Christians." See Jewett, *Romans*, 901–3, also Wuellner, "Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans: An Alternative to the Donfried-Karris Debate over Roman," 136. Cf. Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 375–76. For discussions concerning the integrity issue with chapter 16, see also L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*, JSNTSS 55 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 135–39.

the boasting in this particular section brings forward the question of its rhetorical function.

Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate these two factors to shed light on interpreting Paul's boasting, which is located almost in the end section of his letter to the Romans. The fact that it is essential for him to boast in that section shows that it might possess a significant function for advancing his argument in relation to his travel plan to Rome and Spain.

This research begins with a brief survey of the definition of *καύχησις*. Then, it will be followed by a survey on the function of boasting as a rhetorical device in ancient rhetorical theory. In this case, Plutarch's treatise *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* (Περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινεῖν ἀνεπιφθόνως) is used as the main source because it is the most detailed and comprehensive treatment on the subject matter that was produced near the time of Paul. Following this section, I analyze the function of Paul's boasting in relation to the rhetorical function of the *peroratio* of his letter to the Romans. Some comparative surveys with the *exordium* of the same letter will also be undertaken for a more comprehensive picture.

### METHODOLOGY

The main methodological approach of this paper is rhetorical criticism. This method could be understood as an effort to analyze the literary techniques and rhetorical structure of a text for the purpose of finding the interrelationship between the parts of the text and the meaning of the text as a whole.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, this criticism is a form of comparative study, with the basic assumption that Pauline letters are to be considered as part of the genre of ancient Greco-Roman letters and, consequently, ancient rhetorical features are observable within the Pauline letters.<sup>5</sup> Within an ancient Greco-Roman speech, and thus observable from the Pauline letters, the structure could be distinguished into six parts: *exordium* (introduction), *partitio* (explanation of facts), *probatio* (argument presented in defense of the

4 George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 4.

5 See Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 141.

thesis), *refutatio* (refuting the opposing views), and *peroratio* (conclusion and final points to persuade the audience).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in this paper, the arrangement of such sections and their functions will be used as the framework to analyze chapter 15 of Paul's letter to the Romans.

## DISCUSSION

### Probing Καύκησις

The word “pride” (“boasting” or “reason to boast” according to several translations, cf. NRSV) in Rom. 15:17 is a rendering of the Greek term *καύκησις*. This term, including its related noun form *καύχημα* and verbal form *καυχάομαι*, is found in the New Testament almost exclusively through Pauline writings. It is neither found in the Gospels, Acts of Apostles, nor in the Johannine writings. The highest occurrences are found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, amounting to 27 occurrences in 23 verses, distributed throughout chapters 1-12 (1:12,14; 5:12; 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:2,3; 10:8,13,15,16,17; 11:10,12,16,17,18,30; 12:1,5,6,9).<sup>7</sup> The next highest occurrence is located in his first letter to the Corinthians with nine times (1:29,31; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 9:15,16; 13:3; 15:31), then in Romans with eight times (2:17,23; 3:27; 4:2; 5:2,3,11; 15:17).<sup>8</sup> The rest of the occurrences (12 times) are found in several other letters: once in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (12:19), three times in his letter to the Galatians (6:4,13,14), once in his letter to the Ephesians (2:9), three times in his letter to the Philippians (1:26; 2:16; 3:3), once in the letter to the Hebrews (3:6), and three times in the letter of James (1:9, twice in 4:16).

Paul's usage of *καύκησις* and its related forms in multiple places creates an issue to be resolved. On the one hand, Paul seems to show a positive attitude

<sup>6</sup> G. R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics,” *DLNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 475.

<sup>7</sup> It is unsurprising that among the list of work on the issue of boasting given in note 2 above, 2 Cor. 10-13 takes most of the attention.

<sup>8</sup> It needs to be noted that the reading in 1 Corinthians 13:3 has a textual issue, with which I will not deal here. In this case, I will retain the suggestion provided by the editorial team of the NA and the UBS GNT. In the case for the Romans, it is instructive to mention that Paul also uses another term in the vice list in 1:30 that is synonymous to *καύκησις*, but with a negative sense of boasting: *ἀλαζών*. This term also occurs in the vice list in 2 Timothy 3:2.

toward boasting, as he claims about himself in Rom. 15:17. However, if we look at Rom. 3:27, Paul expresses a rejection against boasting. In it, Paul begins with the question, “Then, where is boasting?” (Ποῦ οὖν ἡ καύχησις), and he answers with “It is excluded” (ἐξεκλείσθη). The same rejection is also applied to the form of boasting mentioned in Rom. 2:17 (boasting about one’s relation to God) and 2:23 (boasting in the law). In regard to this, Robert Jewett correctly comments that the boastings recorded in 2:17 and 2:23 need to be taken as a universal depiction of Jewish boasting and are deemed illegitimate. Thus 3:27 conveys the unacceptability of any kind of boasting, including the ones being conducted by the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup> It is also worth considering Philip Esler’s proposal that this practice of boasting shown in this verse is associated with the claim of one’s honor. Esler asserts that in the ancient Mediterranean, to claim one’s honor publicly was acceptable as long as it was based on a valid foundation.<sup>10</sup>

If we trace the practice of boasting within the Jewish sources, in this case, the Old Testament, there are some clues to be found, mainly when the same term (καύχησις) is used in the Septuagint (LXX).<sup>11</sup> In some instances, boasting is considered unfavorable. Boasting is unfavorable when it is related to one’s fragile condition, as stated in 3 Kings. 21:11 in the LXX (1 Kings 20:11 in the MT), “Let it be sufficient; let not the humpbacked boast (μὴ καυχᾶσθω) like one who is upright.” Another example, boasting is also not acceptable when it accompanies uncertainty, as exhibited in Proverbs 25:14 (LXX) “As winds and clouds and rains are conspicuous, so are those who boast (οἱ καυχώμενοι) of a false gift” and Proverbs

9 Jewett, *Romans*, 295–96. Jewett follows Richard Thompson’s suggestion to take the οὖν in 3:27 as inferential and connected to boasting so that the argument about boasting starting from 2:17 and up to 3:26 should be taken into account (See Jewett’s note 6). See also Jan Lambrecht, “Why Is Boasting Excluded? A Note on Rom 3,27 and 4,2,” in *Pauline Studies: Collected Essays*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 115 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 30–31. Lambrecht also argues that 2:17-3:20, 23 portrays “the factual Jewish situation,” while 3:27 refers to God’s “new initiative” through the law of faith, which is expressed in the justification (v.28).

10 Philip Francis Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 168.

11 Due to the different versification between the LXX and the Masoretic Text (MT), I will follow the versification in the LXX for the examples taken from the LXX.

27:1 “Do not boast (μὴ καυχῶ) of tomorrow; for you do not know what the next day shall bring forth.”

In several places of Psalms, boasting is even associated with the deeds of those who are foolish and ungodly. For instance, Psalm 51:3 (LXX) “Why do you boast (ἐγκαυχᾷ) in evil, O mighty one, (on your) lawlessness (ἀνομίαν) the whole day.” Another one is found in Psalm 73:4 (LXX) “And they who hate you have boasted (ἐνεκαυχήσαντο) in the midst of your feast; they have set up their signs as signs and they were ignorant.” Psalm 93:3 (LXX) also speaks about the sinners and their boasting “How long will the sinners, O Lord, how long will the sinners boast (καυχήσονται)?” This association could also be found in Proverbs 11:7, which seems to correlate boasting to the ungodly just as hope to the righteous, “At the death of a just man his hope does not perish: but the boast (καύχημα) of the ungodly perishes.”

Moreover, the Old Testament also shows that humans cannot boast when confronted by God. This is clearly stated in Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:3 (1 Kingdom 2:3 in the LXX), “Do not boast (μὴ καυχᾷσθε), and do not utter high things, do not let big talking come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and God prepares his own designs.” Humans’ chances to boast could also be easily cancelled by God, as recorded in God’s word to Gideon in Judges 7:2, “The people with you are many, so that I may not deliver the Midianites into their hand, that Israel may not boast (καυχήσεται) against me, saying, ‘My hand has saved me.’”

Despite the unacceptable uses of boasting, as mentioned above, the OT also records a positive attitude toward boasting in certain conditions. It is acceptable to ascribe boasting to God, as in 1 Chronicles 29:11, “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the boasting (τὸ καύχημα), and the victory, and the might.” Boasting is also acceptable when one boasts in God as Psalm 5:12 (LXX) states, “But let those who are having hope in you be glad, they shall rejoice forever, and you shall dwell among them, and all that love your name shall boast (καυχήσονται) in you.” God’s work in his people is also seen as the source for boasting in Psalm 88:18 (LXX), “For you are the boast of their strength; and in your good pleasure shall our horn be exalted.”

These senses of boasting, both the unacceptable and the acceptable ones (boasting in God, ascribed to God, and based on God's work), could also be found in Jewish sources from the intertestamental period. 3 Maccabees 2:17 records the boasting of those who are lawless, "Do not punish us by this uncleanness or chastise us for their profanation, so the transgressors will not boast (μὴ καυχῆσονται) in their wrath and exult in the insolence of their tongue, saying..." Meanwhile, Sirach 50:50 records Simon, the high priest, who boasts in the Lord's name: "Then he went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to boast (καυχῆσασθαι) in his name."

Moreover, two more associations with boasting in the positive sense are included within this period.<sup>12</sup> The first one is the connection made between boasting and the fear of the Lord, as in Sirach 1:11 "The fear of the Lord is honor, and pride (καύχημα), and gladness, and a crown of rejoicing." The second one is in Sirach 39:8, where boasting is considered acceptable where it is attributed to the law of the covenant "He will show the teaching that he had learned, and shall boast (καυχῆσεται) in the law of the covenant of the Lord."

It would seem that Paul generally recognized these positive and negative senses of boasting, which could be discerned from the quotation he uses in 1 Cor. 1:31 and 2 Cor. 10:17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (Ὁ δὲ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω). This quotation, although not entirely exact verbatim, could be perceived as referring to Jeremiah 9:22-23 (LXX) "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not the wise man boast (καυχάσθω) in his wisdom, and let not the strong man boast (καυχάσθω) in his strength, and let not the rich man boast (καυχάσθω) in his wealth; but let him that boasts (ὁ καυχώμενος) boast (καυχάσθω) in this, the understanding and knowing that I am the Lord that exercises mercy, and judgment, and righteousness, upon the earth; for in these things is my pleasure,' says the

<sup>12</sup> R. Bultmann, "Καυχάομαι, Καύχημα, Καύχησις,," *TDNT* 3:647. On this addition, Bultmann notes that Sirach takes the concept from the cultic and eschatological area and applies it for legal righteousness by placing emphasis on the fear of God and adding the sense to boast in the Law.

Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Jewish considerations do not provide a complete picture of how Paul’s boasting functioned effectively in the ears of his audience in Rome (who were a mix of Jews and Gentiles). Thus, our next task should be a survey on how boasting was perceived in the Greco-Roman world.

### Boasting in The Greco-Roman World

Before and during the time of Paul in the Greco-Roman world, boasting, as a part of a broader practice of self-praise (περιαιθολογία),<sup>14</sup> also received both positive and negative attitudes. For example, the negative sense could be found in Theocritus,<sup>15</sup> *Idylls* 5.76-77 [Hopkinson, LCL]:

βέντισθ’ οὔτος, ἐγὼ μὲν ἀλαθέα πάντ’ ἀγορεύω κούδεν καυχέομαι· τύγα μὰν φιλοκέρτομος ἐσσί.	My good man, everything I say is true, and I’m not boasting. You just like to quarrel.
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This is part of Theocritus’ poem in the form of dialogue presenting two figures (Comatas the goatherd and Lacon the shepherd) that are constantly mocking each other. What is quoted here is Comatas’ line as a response to Lacon’s attack in the previous line (Theocritus, *Idylls* 5.74-75), accusing Comatas as a person who talks in an excessive manner (λάλος). The way boasting is used here is in the sense of

13 See C. K. Barrett, “Boasting (Καυχᾶσθαι, Κτλ) in the Pauline Epistles,” in *L’apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception Du Ministère*, ed. Albert Vanhoye, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 364; Duane F. Watson, “Paul and Boasting,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 77; Wojciechowski, “Paul and Plutarch on Boasting,” 99.

14 Outside the NT and the LXX, there are various terms used to denote the sense of boasting and self-praise. In this case, the term καύησις and its related forms are less used in the Greek sources dating before the second century CE compared to its high concentration of usage in the NT and LXX. For details of this calculation see Donahoe, “From Self-Praise to Self-Boasting,” 36–37. This fact is perceived by Wojciechowski as being caused by the too pejorative sense that is contained in the term. Wojciechowski, “Paul and Plutarch on Boasting,” 101–2. See also Ceslas Spicq, “Καυχάομαι, Καύημα, Καύησις,” *TLNT* 2:1994, 296. However, Forbes points out a different finding. According to Forbes, ἀλαζονεία and ὑπεροψία are the ones that contain the sense which is closer to ὕβρις. See Forbes, “Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony,” 10. Forbes’ assertion is supported by the survey conducted by Donahoe which reveals that the terms from the stem ἀλαζ- (ἀλαζων, ἀλαζονεία) and αὐχ- (αὐχῆσις, αὐχέω) only refer to a negative sense, while καύησις (and its related forms) along with other terms within the semantic range of self-praise still retain the positive sense. See Donahoe, “From Self-Praise to Self-Boasting,” 21–44. Meanwhile, the term περιαιθολογία is used by Plutarch, as we shall see, more as a technical term for the practice of boasting or self-praise. To be noted, Plutarch also employs some other terms in referring to self-praise.

15 Theocritus is estimated to live around the early third century BCE. There is no information regarding his life except from the poems often attributed to him. He is known to work around Cos and Alexandria and to be the founder of the bucolic (pastoral) genre. See *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Theocritus,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theocritus> (accessed April 30, 2023).



overstating the fact.

Boasting is also considered unacceptable when compared to the power of a deity. This attitude could be discerned from the last of the three poems Pindar<sup>16</sup> composed for the sons of Lampon (Pindar, *Isth.* 5:51 [Race, LCL]):

ἀλλ' ὁμως καύγαμα κατάβρεχε σιγᾶ·  
 Ζεὺς τὰ τε καὶ τὰ νέμει,  
 Ζεὺς ὁ πάντων κύριος. ἐν δ' ἔρατεινῷ  
 μέλιτι καὶ τοιαῖδε τιμαὶ καλλίνικονχάρμ'  
 ἀγαπάζονται. μαρνάσθω τις ἔρδων

But nevertheless, drench your boast in silence;  
 Zeus dispenses a variety of things,  
 Zeus the lord of all. And in poetry's delightful  
 honey such honors as these also welcome  
 joyous song of victory. Let a man strive to  
 perform.

Here the human is expected to stifle his boasting into silence when facing Zeus' exhibition of power; thus, one's achievement of winning the battle (in athletics or war) should be perceived as generosity of the deity. This concept of refraining from boasting in the face of the power of a deity is aligned with the Jewish concept of the same condition as mentioned.

In addition to the concept of boasting and the deity, here is another poem from Pindar (Ol. 9.38 [Race, LCL]) says:

ἀπό μοι λόγοντοῦτον, στόμα, ῥῖψον·  
 ἐπεὶ τό γε λοιδορῆσαι θεοῦς  
 ἐχθρὰ σοφία, καὶ τὸ καυχᾶσθαι παρὰ καιρόν

But cast that story away from me, my mouth!  
 for reviling the gods  
 is a hateful skill, and boasting inappropriately.

Here, Pindar attempts to associate the sense of speaking abusively of the gods with the act of inappropriate boasting or boasting that is out of time or proportion (παρὰ καιρόν). In a slightly different form of boasting than found in Theocritus' work above, both cases of Pindar's express a negative attitude toward boasting, which is not associated with the truth of the saying, but more to the awareness of one's lower position and acknowledging the deity's power and authority.

Plutarch<sup>17</sup> also explores this subject matter in his work on Aemilius. After quoting Aemilius' speech that is addressed to his sons, sons-in-law, and the young

16 Pindar is a Greek poet who is considered to live around the late sixth century to the mid-fifth century BCE. He is known as a lyric poet, which is thought to represent the traditional style of his culture. See *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Pindar," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pindar> (accessed April 30, 2023).

17 Plutarch is a Greek author known to be active as a philosophy teacher in Rome. He lived around the middle of the first century CE, almost around the time of the apostle Paul. Most of Plutarch's works address various topics, from ethical and religious, to political areas. See *Encyclopedia*

officers on the issue of fortune and human affairs, Plutarch provides his comments (*Aem.* 27:6 [Perrin, LCL]): “Many such words were uttered by Aemilius, we are told, and he sent the young men away with their vainglorious insolence and pride well curbed by his trenchant speech, as by a bridle” (τοιαῦτά φασι πολλὰ διαλεχθέντα τὸν Αἰμίλιον ἀποπέμψαι τοὺς νέους εὖ μάλα τὸ καύχημα καὶ τὴν ὕβριν, ὥσπερ χαλινῶ, τῷ λόγῳ κόπτοντι κεκολασμένους.). The sense of “vainglorious insolence” here is clearly associated in relation to Aemilius’ own speech several lines before it: “Abandon, then, young men, this empty insolence (τὸ κενὸν φρύαγμα τοῦτο) and pride of victory (γαυρίαμα τῆς νίκης), and take a humble posture as you confront the future” (Plutarch, *Aem.* 27.5). On this matter, Plutarch seems to be aware of the negative senses inherent in the practice of boasting. That awareness might play some role in his producing his detailed work on self-praise, to which we now shall turn.

### **Plutarch’s on Praising Oneself Inoffensively**

Plutarch’s treatise *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* is considered the only work from the Greco-Roman antiquity that deals with self-praise in the most exhaustive detail. The title of this treatise, as provided in the manuscript, is *Περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινεῖν νεπιφθόνως*, which also contains the Latin title *De laude ipsius* (or *De ipso citra invidiam laudando*), while the catalogue Lamprias no. 85 gives it the title *Πῶς ἂν τις ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινέσειεν νεπιφθόνος*.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned clearly in the treatise (539A), it is addressed to a statesman (ὁ πολιτικός ἀνὴρ) named Herculanius (Ἡρκλανέ), which at the same time could indicate that it is the work of Plutarch during his old age.<sup>19</sup> Hans D. Betz provides a valuable rhetorical analysis of this treatise, which has resulted in a rhetorical disposition of five parts: *exordium* (539A-

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*Britannica Online*, s.v. “Plutarch,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Plutarch> (accessed April 30, 2023)

18 See Hans Dieter Betz, “De Laude Ipsius (Moralia 539A-547F),” in *Plutarch’s Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature*, vol. 4, *Studia ad corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 367. According to Betz, the title provided in the manuscript indicates the formulation of the treatise in the diatribe style. The text that will be used here is: Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, *Plutarch Moralia*, vol. VII, LCL (1959).

19 De Lacy and Einarson, *Plutarch Moralia*, VII, LCL:113.

E), *propositio* (539E-540C), *argumentum* (540C-546B), *exhortatio* (546B-547F), *conclusio* (547F).<sup>20</sup>

Plutarch begins the treatise in the *exordium* by acknowledging the background of the issue of self-praise, which sets the tension between the common consensus and the practice: it is commonly considered offensive and odious,<sup>21</sup> but, by taking the examples of Euripides and Pindar, the practice is quite common even among those who detest it (539A-C). Plutarch continues by providing three common reasons why it is considered offensive and detestable (539D-E): (1) self-praisers (τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς ἐπαινοῦντας) are shameless, (2) they are unfair by taking the rights of others to choose whom to praise, (3) they evoke envy on the side of their audience, and at the same time by forcing their audience to approve the praises, the praise becomes mere flattery.<sup>22</sup>

Then, Plutarch moves to his *propositio* by stating the thesis (539E) that in spite of these common reasons, there are certain situations where self-praise (περιαυθολογία) could be useful. Some of those possible situations are then elaborated on by Plutarch. First, self-praise is useful in situations that might demand that “the truth be told about oneself,” so long as it is not for personal glory and pleasure (πρὸς οὐδεμίαν αὐτοῦ δόξαν ἢ χάριν). Second, self-praise is acceptable when praising good deeds and the good character of oneself might lead the audience to perform the same good. Third, self-praise is useful when it is not intended to

20 Betz, “De Laude Ipsius (Moralia 539A-547F),” 4:368–72.

21 Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.*, 11.1.16. In a similar tone, Quintilian states, “First of all, then, any boasting about oneself is wrong, but an orator’s boasting of his own eloquence is especially wrong. It not only bores the hearers but generally also disgusts them.” Nevertheless, for Quintilian, an open self-praise is “more tolerable” than when it is performed with “inverted vanity.”

22 From the *exordium*, we could discern that Plutarch’s main concern is the ethical problem of self-praise which is closely related with how one should deliver a speech in public. On this matter, I agree with Betz assertion that the concern lies on two problems: religious and ethical, with the rhetorical concern being part of the ethical, although Schellenberg objects by suggesting to perceive the treatise as pure ethical tractate with no rhetorical concern. See Betz, “De Laude Ipsius (Moralia 539A-547F),” 4:373–77. Cf. Ryan S. Schellenberg, “Paul’s (In)appropriate Boasting: Periautologia,” in *Rethinking Paul’s Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10-13*, Early Christianity and Its Literature 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 99. Concerning religious problems, Betz argues that self-deification, as the metamorphosis of self-praise, serves as the background of Plutarch’s entire argument. In regard to this, I must concur with Donahoe’s comment that Betz is overstating the issue of self-deification in Plutarch’s argument mainly because Plutarch places the highlight mostly on ethical and interpersonal issues, and not religious. See note 5 in Donahoe, “From Self-Praise to Self-Boasting,” 5.

gain any rewards or compensation but for further and nobler actions. Finally, self-praise is fruitful in a situation when by praising oneself, one initiates a trusting and friendly situation to do good. Ending this *propositio*, Plutarch opens the possibilities of other ways of self-praise that can be useful while reminding the reader to avoid its frivolous and offensive traits (540A).

Plutarch then continues to the *argumentum* to elaborate more detailed treatments of cases in which self-praise is needed. Two main cases are stated: with external antidotes (540C-544C) and with inherent antidotes (544C-546B). In the first main case, there are two types of opponents that might be encountered: the intractable and envious (540C-543A), and the fair-minded (543A-544C). When facing the intractable and envious, self-praise might be used as a forensic tool and employed in the following occasions: (1) It could be used when defending (ἀπολογούμενος) one's good name or answering a charge (540C-541A);<sup>23</sup> (2) The unfortunate has more spacious room than the fortunate in terms of self-praise (μεγαλαυχία), because when the unfortunate takes a stand for himself and moves from a humbled and piteous state to an attitude of triumph and pride, he expresses a great and indomitable quality, not offense (541A-C); (3) When one is wrongfully affronted and outraged (541C-E),<sup>24</sup> he may praise himself (μεγαλεγορίαν) in the freedom of speech (παρρησία) that is part of the plea for justice (δικαιολογία); (4) Self-praise could be used when one's triumphs are being reproached, thus reversing the effect of those charges (541E-F); (5) Self-praise could be used as a contrast, that is by admitting one's past action, but showing that the opposite of that action would have been shameful (541F-542A); (6) Self-praise could also be done in a harmonious blending of praise of the audience (542B-C); (7) Self-praise could be performed by praising another person whose aims and acts are the same

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Quintilian *Inst.*, 11.1.18 [Russell, LCL]. Quintilian also notes a similar justification for boasting, "Yet he often had some justification for this also, because he was either defending persons who had assisted him in putting down the Catilinarian conspiracy, or responding to envy..."

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Quintilian *Inst.*, 11.1.23 [Russell, LCL]. Quintilian highlights the important of self-praise, that when one is "opposing his enemies and detractors that he commonly makes greater claims for himself, because he had to defend his policies when they were brought up against him."

as oneself, and whose general character is similar (542C-D); or (8) Self-praise could be performed by attributing part of it to chance or god.

The second set of opponents that one might encounter are fair-minded people. To face such opponents, Plutarch provides several occasions where self-praise is permissible: (1) One might amend the praise offered by another on the matter of being eloquent (λόγιον), rich (πλούσιον), or powerful (δυνατὸν), and transfer it to other qualities of character, humanity, and usefulness, in order to show the audience that he is displeased because the praise is grounded on the wrong reason, thus one does not need to introduce his own praise (543A-B); (2) To remove the effect of displeasure, disapproval, or even envy one might incorporate into his self-praise some minor shortcomings, failures or imperfections (even poverty or low birth), but not the most degrading ones,.

Concerning the second main case, “inherent antidotes,” Plutarch mentions the strategy of avoiding envy in self-praise by stressing the hardship and peril that play a part in one’s success (544C-D). There are also some advantages of self-praise, Plutarch continues, that might be achieved without being intended: (1) When self-praise is practiced with the purpose of exhortation and inspiring the audience with emulation and ambition (φιλοτιμίας), one “arouses and spurs the hearer, and not only awakens his ardour and fixes his purpose, but also affords him hope that the end can be attained and is not impossible” (544D-E); (2) For enemies, self-praise could serve to overawe, restrain, to humble, and subdue, while for friends and fellow countrymen, self-praise could function to calm and chasten the overbold, and even to restore and rouse the spirits of the terrified and timorous (544F-545D); (3) Self-praise could also be used to counteract a false praise of evil examples and wrong policies as if they were noble, and thus, when placed side by side, one shows a better course to follow by pointing out the difference between what is useful and profitable against the vain and superfluous (545D-546B).

Plutarch opens his *Exhortatio* by stating his concern (546B), that is how to avoid unseasonable self-praise (ὅπως ἄν ἕκαστος ἐκφύγοι τὸ ἐπαθνεῖν ἀκαίρως ἑαυτὸν). On this matter, Plutarch firstly calls attention to the awareness that self-love

(φιλαυτία) is the most basic temptation in practicing self-praise (περιαυτολογία), a temptation which may even capture those who are considered to have a “modest interest in glory” (546B). Thus, the recommendation is, Plutarch states, to avoid the situation entirely or to remain in it with extreme care (546C).

There could be four such situations that are elaborated further by Plutarch. The first situation involves the praising of others. Plutarch states that there are occasions when “others are praised, our rivalry erupts...into praise of self” (546C-D). This situation might even evoke jealousy when the one being praised is equal or even inferior.

The second situation is concerned mostly with the courtiers and the military, but also with those who are guests at a royal banquet or even those who handle the affairs of the state. This condition might happen when “in telling of exploits that have been lucky and have turned out according to plan, many are so pleased with themselves that before they know it, they have drifted into vainglorious boasting (μεγαλαυχίαν)” (546D-E).<sup>25</sup>

The third situation occurs when exercising censure and reproof. The danger lies when “a man intermingles praise of himself with censure of another, and uses another’s disgrace to secure glory for himself” (546F). This is deemed by Plutarch as odious and vulgar. This situation, Plutarch advises, needs to be carefully avoided (547A).

The final scenario correlates with the situation of praise received from others. In this exchange, “one with a too ardent weakness for fame” is often tempted to take over, praise himself, and even go further, eventually invalidating any previous praise from others (547B). Thus, Plutarch suggests that one should “abstain from praising themselves when they are praised by others...should blush when praised, not unblushing...” (547B).

<sup>25</sup> It needs to be noted that, especially in this situation, Plutarch provides advice, “We must therefore look warily to ourselves when we recount praise (ἐπαινίους) received from others and see that we do not allow any taint or suggestion of self-love (φιλαυτία) and self-praise (περιαυτολογία) to appear, lest we be thought to make Patroclus our excuse, while we are really singing our own praise.” (546F)

Plutarch closes the *exhortatio* with several statements related to ethical precautions (εὐλάβεια) and safeguards (φυλακὴ) of self-praise. His first suggestion is “not allowing ourselves to be drawn out by the praise nor to be led on by the questions” (547D). The second is to “attend closely to the self-praise of others (ἑτέροις ἑαυτοῦς ἐπαινοῦσι)” (547D). The third is “to remember the distaste (πρᾶγμα) and vexation (λυπηρὸν) that was felt by all” (547D). Plutarch’s final exhortation is to remember the consequences of dispraise (ψόγος) from others, vainglory (κενοδοξίας) resulting in an inglorious end (τέλος ἀδοξία), and the audience being left vexed (547F). Plutarch ends his treatise with the *conclusio* “we shall avoid talking about ourselves unless we have in prospect some great advantage to our hearers or to ourselves” (547F).

During the time of Paul, boasting and self-praise were commonly practiced despite their detestable nuance in the Greco-Roman world. One common condition was allowed both within the Greco-Roman culture and that which came from the Jewish tradition: boasting and deity. In this case, humans cannot boast when confronted with God, and boasting is permissible when it is conducted by acknowledging God’s generosity as the driving force behind one’s achievements or successes. However, that which is discussed at great length by Plutarch in his treatise on self-praise shows that one is allowed to boast about his good character, humanity, and usefulness. It is instructive to highlight that one of the advantages of self-praise is its didactic nature. Self-praise provides an example for its audience to follow while at the same time evoking the desire for such emulation. This highlight is proposed in relation to Paul’s boasting in the *peroratio* of Romans, which neither shows Paul being defensive nor suggests that there was even an opposition that was launching an attack on Paul from Rome. This leads us to the analysis of Paul’s *peroratio* in Romans and how Paul’s exhortative boasting might fit in.

### **Paul’s Inspirational Boasting in Romans’ *Peroratio***

Within the rhetorical analysis, *peroratio* (ἐπίλογος) contains several functions. Aristotle in (*The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 3.19.1 [Freese, LCL]) mentions four

functions of the *peroratio*, “to dispose the hearer favourably towards oneself and unfavourably towards the adversary; to amplify and depreciate; to excite the emotions of the hearer; to recapitulate.” Meanwhile, Cicero (*De Inventione*, 1.98-109 [Hubbell, LCL]) divides the *peroratio* into three parts: the summing-up (*enumeratio*), the exciting of indignation against the opponent (*indignatio*), and the arousal of pity and sympathy (*conquestio*). Quintilian, on the other hand, suggests a division of two: one that involves repetition and recapitulation of the facts (*enumeratio*) and one that appeals to emotions (*Inst.*, 6.1.1. [Russell, LCL]). It needs to be noted that Quintilian also states that to the Attic orators in Athens and philosophers, recapitulation was the only form of peroration, because appeals to emotion were deemed forbidden in a public announcement (*Inst.*, 6.1.7 [Russell, LCL]). In *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.47 [Caplan, LCL], *peroratio* is said to have three parts: the summary (*enumeratio*) that gathers together and recalls the points which have been made, the amplification (*amplificatio*), and the appeal to pity (*commiseratio*).

In light of the convention stated above, the *peroratio* in Romans (15:14-29), first of all, exhibits the recapitulation (*enumeratio*) of major points from the letter, especially in relation to the ones stated in the *exordium*, although without restating the thesis statement.<sup>26</sup> Paul carefully and briefly selects the major points he needs to summarize. Douglas J. Moo provides a helpful insight to view the parallel between the *peroratio* and the *exordium* (although he uses epistolary terms and point of view), as follows:<sup>27</sup>

“Commendation of the Romans”	15:14	1:8
“Apostle to the Gentiles”	15:15b-21	1:3, 13
Hindrance in visiting Rome	15:22	1:13a
“Indebtedness”	15:27	1:14

26 Wuellner, “Paul’s Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans: An Alternative to the Donfried-Karris Debate over Roman,” 136, unconvincingly suggests taking 15:14-15 as the recapitulation of the thesis statement. Providing Paul’s thesis statement at 1:16-17, I could not draw any thematic nor linguistic relation between the two. Thus, I would lean toward Witherington’s insight that in deliberative rhetoric (such as Romans), the thesis statement does not need to be restated. See Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 352.

27 D. J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 885–86. Moo also asserts the parallel between 15:30-32 with 1:9-10. Compare the list in Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 352, following James D. G. Dunn. Some parallel could also be seen in details, such as Paul’s reformulation his ministering act in 1:9 (λατρεῦω) into a “minister” (λειτουργός) with a “priestly act” (ιερουργοῦντα) in 15:16.



Desire to minister for mutual blessing      15:29      1:11-12

This parallel does not mean that there is no correlation between the *peroratio* with the *probatio*. In fact, some of the relations between the two could be discerned with a high level of clarity. Such is the case of the contrast between Paul's compliment in 15:14: "you are full of goodness, being filled with all knowledge" (μεστοί έστε άγαθωσύνης, πεπληρωμένοι πάσης γνώσεως), and the vice list he provides in 1:29: "being filled with all wickedness, evil,..." and "full of jealousy, murder,..." (πεπληρωμένους πάση άδικία πονηρία, etc. and μεστούς φθόνου φόνου, etc.).<sup>28</sup>

Recapitulation is not the only element that is found in the *peroratio*. There is a second element, which is of equal importance. Cicero named it *conquestio*, which Quintilian described as an appeal to emotions. At this point, I would argue that Paul's boasting functions as an appeal to emotions. This is firstly grounded on the structure that Paul deliberately provides by placing his boasting after setting up two things: the compliment (15:14) and the rationale of his bold writing (15:15-16). These two parts, Jewett rightly notes, fit the confidence formula that is found elsewhere in ancient letters and function to win the attention of the audience, especially with the purpose of appealing for action.<sup>29</sup>

After that compliment and gentle apology, Paul moves to his boasting statement (15:17). Two phrases in that statement need a closer look: "in Christ Jesus" (έν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) and "the things for God" (τά προς τόν θεόν). The phrase "in Christ Jesus" reveals two things regarding the root of Paul's boasting in that verse. First, it shows an alignment with the conception of boasting that is allowed in his Jewish heritage. Second, it resonates with one of the occasions where boasting is considered acceptable in the Greco-Roman culture: "when part of it is attributed to chance or God."

<sup>28</sup> See Jewett, *Romans*, 904.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 903-5. In this case, Jewett follows Stanley Olson's findings on polite apologies in papyrus letters that were often made to the recipient who was depicted to have already the excellent character to exercise the action.

The phrase “the things for God” refers to the object of his boasting, which he elaborates more in vv. 18-19 as Christ’s accomplishment through him in his ministry to the Gentiles. These verses (vv. 18-19) also remark on Paul’s own character: his submission and devotion to performing the duty assigned to him by God. Paul was completely aware that he was in charge of one task: “to proclaim the Gospel for the purpose of the obedience of the Gentiles” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἔθνῶν). He perceived his accomplishment of that task as Christ’s and not of his own, and he had faithfully performed all of them from Jerusalem until around Illyricum. However, being zealous of his task, Paul did not stop there.<sup>30</sup> He expressed his plan to go to the West as part of performing his task; the place where the Gospel had not yet been proclaimed (vv. 20-21). This exhibition of character functions to be the exemplary model for emulation, which is in accordance with the first advantage of self-praise that is already stated in Plutarch’s work above (*Moralia*, 544D).<sup>31</sup>

For the purpose of supporting his ambition, he cites the scripture in v. 20, which also serves as a transition to the section elaborating on the action he is appealing for in vv. 22-29. Verses 22-29 are structured in the form of *inclusio*. This section clearly begins and ends with the topic of Paul’s future plan to go to Spain through Rome (vv. 22-24 and 28-29). The *inclusio* encapsulates Paul’s explanation regarding his present journey to Jerusalem in order to deliver material support, either financial or logistical. This elaboration on his present journey is used by Paul as an example of the action that he will require from the Christians in Rome, which he carefully mentions in his travel plan to Rome: “to be sent to Spain by them.” The verb he uses on this request, προπέμπω, is often used in relation to the action of missionary support, which could vary from accompaniment to financial support.<sup>32</sup> This request is well founded on the exemplary character that Paul states within

30 Paul uses an effective term denoting his own feeling on this matter: φιλοτιμούμενον (lit. a love of honor), which could be rendered as “having ambition” or, more precisely, “consider rendering a service as an honor.” He considered it an honor to proclaim the Gospel in places that were yet untouched by it.

31 Note also the term φιλοτιμίας used by Plutarch for “ambition.”

32 See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 901, note 26, and also Jewett, *Romans*, 925. The support could vary from being accompanied by coworkers, provisioning for the journey, help on the customs and languages, and even financial and logistical.

his boasting section. His devotion to carrying out the task of Christ to evangelize to the Gentiles is set as the model for the Romans' congregations to follow. He invites them to join him in his "ambition" of ministering in places where the Gospel has not yet been heard.

The use of boasting in gathering support is also attested in ancient writing by Sallust, a Roman historian, and politician in the first century BC. In his work *The War with Jugurtha*, Sallust provides the speech of Gaius Marius, who was gathering support for war while facing the attack from his opponents. In that speech, Marius boasts about his achievements and characters in contrast (*synkrisis*) to the lineage privileges of his rivals (*The War with Jugurtha*, 85.13-25) and states that his skills that are the best for the nation (*The War*, 85.33). By the end of his boasting, he urges for military support from the people (*The War*, 85.44-47): "Now, inasmuch as I have replied to them to the extent that my character—but not their crimes—demanded,... do you, who are of military age, join your efforts with mine and take part in your nation's affairs, and let no one feel fear as a result of the disaster of others or the arrogance of generals."

Marius' boasting is bolder than that of Paul's, especially since Marius has to counter the attack from his opponents, and his appeal sounds stronger and more passionate than Paul's. However, this speech shows that boasting to show one's character could be used to inspire the audience and to garner support, just like the way Paul uses his boasting to show his own character as an example, which would inspire the audience to support his mission plan to Spain.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate that Paul's boasting in Rom 15:17 functions to show his character as he is building his argument in appealing for the support of his missionary plan to Spain. I have surveyed how boasting is perceived in the Jewish tradition and also in the Greco-Roman culture, especially in its rhetorical tradition. This survey has shown that Paul's boasting in Rom 15:17 is well rooted in his Jewish heritage. Also, it is a well-grounded rhetorical strategy to

appeal for action. In this case, boasting is used as a means of showing one's character for the purpose of inspiring the audience to emulate it in action: an invitation to the Christian congregations in Rome to provide the necessary support for Paul's ministry to Spain.

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