BENEFACTION-RECIPROCITY LANGUAGE IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

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By

Brent A. Moody

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SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION

"For too long we have read Scripture with nineteenth-century eyes and sixteenth-century questions. It's time to get back to reading with first-century eyes and twenty-first century questions."[1] N. T. Wright's clever quip implies that treasures of modern Scriptural applications remain hidden if we fail to first appreciate a documents original setting and purpose. Unfortunately, modern readers often unnaturally force contemporary ideas into ancient texts and perpetuate a tradition of misapplication and misunderstanding. Historical, economic, ethnic, religious and educational background can shape interpretation of Scripture. Using the extreme examples of postcolonial and feminist interpretation David DeSilva proposes,

> "...biblical interpretation is a political and ideological act. As we explore our own ideology and biases more openly, we are freed to pursue self-critical interpretation...It is at this point that we are most powerfully confronted with the text as Word

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[1]N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 37. Wright is dealing with issues related to justification, but the overall point remains the same. Many read Scripture with only modern influences in view, and no consideration for the original occasion or purpose.

of God, interpreting us rather than the other way around."[2]

In an effort to properly consider context, some modern scholars have adopted socio-rhetorical interpretation.[3] Peter O'Brien's 1999 work suggests that such analysis of Ephesians has been neglected in comparison to the undisputed letters of Paul;[4] however, the interpretive landscape of Ephesians has changed in the last decade. DeSilva's introduction, published in 2004, utilized the socio-rhetorical approach throughout, including his overview of Ephesians. Ben Witherington III and Roy Jeal have produced substantial additions toward a socio-rhetorical interpretation of Ephesians.[5]

The structure of Ephesians contains two main sections. Chapters 1-3 are theological and chapters 4-6 are exhortation.[6] The structure is simple: Indicative followed by imperative. Disagreements have surfaced over the intent of these two distinct

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[2]David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation (*Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 25. DeSilva devotes three pages to explaining his use of socio-rhetorical interpretation.

[3]Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament,* 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 548-49; DeSilva, 23-27. Johnson discusses social and rhetorical analysis in a section called "New Approaches to the New Testament." DeSilva explains this method and gives credit to Vernon Robbins for the interpretive model. In the area of New Testament rhetoric Robbins and G. A. Kennedy's works are often cited.

[4]Peter T. O'Brien, *Ephesians.* Pillar Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 80;. O'Brien sites Andrew Lincoln as an exception to this neglect.

[5]Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1-21; R. R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 2000): Primary source not available.

[6]Lincoln, xxxvi-xxxvii; Johnson, 359-71. Both provide standard outlines of the book, and the message of the two sections.

sections.[7] Socio-rhetorical analysis seeks to discover the purpose of this style and what influenced it. It asks "why does Paul write the letter this way?" and "what social norms are at the foundation of his language and presentation?"[8]

DeSilva breaks socio-rhetorical interpretation into a four step process:

> The interpreter (1) engages the text itself in detailed analysis, (2) examines the ways the text converses with other "texts" in its environment, (3) investigates the world that produces the text, and (4) analyzes how the text affects that very world.[9]

The purpose of this paper is to determine if benefaction and reciprocity affected Paul's[10] style in Ephesians. Steps two and three in DeSilva's process are vital to deciding

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[7]Witherington, 221-22. Jeal, 28-9, 43; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* World Biblical Commentary vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), xlii. As an example of this Witherington proposes the idea that Eph. 4-6 could also be a form of epideictic rhetoric, while Jeal and Lincoln divide the book evenly between demonstrative and deliberative rhetoric.

[8]DeSilva, 24. These questions are the result of steps two and three in DeSilva's four step process for socio-rhetorical analysis. Step one, detailed analysis of the text, would uncover the division between indicative and imperative.

[9]DeSilva, 24.

[10]I am aware of the authorship debate, but Paul will be assumed as the author in this paper. Witherington, 224. Witherington's conclusion on authorship is helpful. "There are difficulties in attributing Ephesians to Paul, but these are insignificant in comparison with the difficulties of attributing it to an imitator." For more discussion on authorship see Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 6-36; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 7-11. Talbert's discussion is more concise but still helpful.

whether or not first-century social customs and rhetorical style influenced Paul's delivery (in either written form, or read aloud as homily[11]).

HONOR-SHAME CULTURE

Gosnell proposes that honor and shame language dominates the Ephesian letter.[12] Honor-shame is certainly the foundation of Paul's social setting. Benefaction and reciprocity, The main subject to be discussed, is a matter of honor and shame. Within honor-shame societies, behavior reflects not only on self but also on family or community.[13] Gosnell explains, "in honor-shame cultures...one is more concerned with being perceived as 'honorable by the community' than with being 'honorable before one's conscience.'"[14] Individual desire to be within the community and the community's desire for loyalty among its members are heightened in such a culture. Desire for honor

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[11]Witherington, 15-23. He exposes the similarities between Ephesians and the typical sermon fashion of Paul's contemporaries. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 133. Richards does not view the presence of "oratorical devices" a threat to epistolary style.

[12]Peter W. Gosnell, "Honor and Shame Rhetoric as a Unifying Motif in Ephesians," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16 (January 2006): 106, 112. His thesis is "to show how honor and shame language, saturating every section of the letter, ties together all of its varied contents." He then explains how each section within the letter ties into the honor-shame theme.

[13]Ferguson, 69. Ferguson provides a concise but helpful section on honor and shame.

[14]Gosnell, 106. Gosnell continues to explain the differences between a "guilt society" and a "shame society" on pages 107-108. He then focuses on how these issues relate to Ephesians.

shaped the ancient world. It was necessary for social order and even community survival. Teaching children from birth to seek honor was not purely a matter of virtue. It also served the functional purpose of uniting family, community and empire. DeSilva notes, "courage in battle, necessary for a city's survival, wins honor and lasting remembrance."[15] It is no mistake that an act so vital to the city's defense is rewarded with high honor.

Unwillingness among Christian communities to participate in pagan activities disrupted unity. They were accused of being troublemakers and blamed for the "gods' disfavor."[16] The natural response of the community was to shame them back into conformity.[17] Given the attention given to this kind of persecution in New Testament books like 1 Peter and Hebrews, it must have worked.

The "Letter of Emperor Pius to the Ephesians in Commendation of Benefactor Vedius Antoninus"[18] illustrates the importance of honoring benefactors of a city. The Emperor is displeased by the lack of gratitude shown to Antoninus by the Ephesian people. Pius reminds them of "many large buildings" built by Antoninus, and then expresses his thankfulness that men like Antoninus take interest in their city even when

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[15]DeSilva, 125. Military service may be the closest we come to understanding honor-shame in America.

[16]DeSilva, 844.

[17]DeSilva, 843. DeSilva makes this statement about the persecution in 1 Peter: "They have fallen victim to their society's social-control techniques of shaming, labeling and marginalizing, all reflective of their neighbors' attempts to cajole them back into conformity with the local customs and values."

[18]SIG 850; Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982), 69-70. Danker provides the english translation.

they are not shown proper honor. City beautification brought honor to the emperor, who sometimes offered assistance, and the benefactor. But if the people failed to honor the benefactor, as the Ephesians failed to do, it could break down the whole system. To merit a letter from the Emperor, this must have been a concern. Threat of dishonor, and its consequences, was a means of maintaining order in society.

It would be a mistake to assume total cross-cultural agreement regarding specific matters of honor and shame.[19] Various groups within the Greco-Roman world defined honor and shame by their own standards. This is particularly clear among the Christian community. For example, 1 Peter argues for the honor of the saints despite their dishonorable position within culture. This is the main thrust of 1 Peter 2:4-10. At the same time, Peter, like Paul (Eph. 5:22-6:9), encourages adherence to the household code (1 Pet. 2:13-3:7). He instructs, "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable..."[20] (1 Pet. 2:12). While there were some differences, general principles of honor-shame existed among most communities.

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[19]DeSilva, 126-28. Greco-Roman culture was dominant, but various other cultural influences remained. DeSilva discusses these "subcultures" in more detail.

[20]Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

It is important to understand that the principle of reciprocity is inevitably tied to the underlying patron-client system, epideictic rhetoric[21], and honor-shame culture.[22] Incorporating the fullness of these concepts into an analysis of Ephesians is complex[23]. Scholars often focus in one of these areas.[24] These ideas will surface in the following discussion of benefaction and reciprocity in Ephesians. Best offers helpful perspective to those who wade through the various compelling proposals regarding the presence of cultural influences on the structure and style of Ephesians:

> ...does everything that is written have to have one precise, identifiable model? Authors when writing draw simultaneously on many models and mix them in

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[21]Witherington, 215-230. Epideictic rhetoric is found in written form in honorific decree, and was used for the art of persuasion by orators. Witherington discusses the use of these techniques within sermons. Both of these ideas factor into the discussion of Paul's style in Ephesians.

[22]DeSilva, 125. "The demonstration of gratitude to one's patron is supported by the threat of irrevocable dishonor..."; Ferguson, 67. Patron's show grace as benefactors to their clients who in turn show gratitude (sometimes in the form of honorific decrees). Not only do they honor their patron, but they avoid dishonor themselves. DeSilva calls this the "building block" of society.

[23]Frederick W. Danker, "2 Peter 1: A Solemn Decree," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (January 1978): 64-82*;* Danker, *Benefactor, 26-29.* Each of these subsets of study contain considerable depth. Danker's prolific work on honorifics and benefaction, and their connection to NT works like 2 Peter and Ephesians, exposes this reality. From the focal point of benefaction and reciprocity in Ephesians a summary discussion of related influences can be included.

[24]Gosnell, 105, 112; Holland Hendrix, "On the Form and Ethos of Ephesians." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42 (1988): 9; Witherington, 221-22. Gosnell's title makes obvious the object of his focus. Hendrix, Danker, and Jeal side with benefaction and reciprocity as Paul's focus. Witherington entertains the idea that all of Ephesians could be epideictic rhetoric, but he seems congenial to Jeal's position.

such a way that their compositions are always in some particulars different from other writings.[25]

BENEFACTION IN EPHESIANS 1-3

There is general agreement that Paul presents God as a benefactor in Ephesians 1-3.[26] Gosnell, who oppose the idea that benefaction-reciprocity is the central theme in Ephesians, admits, “Ephesians most definitely portrays God as benefactor, and a study with regard to this topic would be quite valuable.”[27] Whitlark, who opposes reciprocity in Ephesians, confesses, “Ephesians does contain a motif that is common to Greco-Roman benefaction. God in giving χαρις has acted for the praise of the glory of His χαρις.”[28]

James Harrison’s *Paul’s Language of Grace*, a revision of his PhD thesis, explores the connections of χαρις to

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[25]Best, 62. Danker and Hendrix believe Ephesians is modeled after honorific decree. Best can agree that certain portions match this genre, but he does not believe it fits the entire letter.

[26]Best, 62; Hendrix, 7; Talbert, 24-25. Lincoln, 10-78. Lincoln is added because although he does mention Greek influence, it is striking that his focus is firmly on Jewish influence in the benediction (Eph. 1:3-14). Jewish influence is important, but it does fit the focus of this paper.

[27]Gosnell, 114. He goes on to explain that God is only portrayed as benefactor in the first half of the letter. His focus is on unifying the book.

[28]Jason Whitlark, "Enabling Charis: Transformation of the Convention of Reciprocity by Philo and in Ephesians." *Perspectives In Religious Studies* 30 (2003): 356. Jerome H. Neyrey, "God, benefactor and patron: the major cultural model for interpreting the deity in Greco-Roman antiquity." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 27 (June 2005): 483, 491-92. Whitlark’s perspective on the saints response to God’s grace is similar to what Neyrey calls “generalized reciprocity.”

benefaction. He argues that Paul's language was affected by the Augustan culture in which he lived.[29] The LXX most frequently spoke of God's benefaction with the term "mercy." Discussing terms used for God's "covenantal beneficence" Harrison observes, "Paul rarely employs its LXX equivalents (ἐλεος, ἐλεειν). Instead, unexpectedly, he magnifies χαρις and its cognates."[30] Whitlark claims, "χαρις attains a prominent place in both the language of reciprocity in the ancient Mediterranean world and in the Pauline corpus (100 out of the 154 occurrences in the New Testament)."[31] Paul's regular appeal to God's grace in Ephesians would naturally bring benefaction to the mind of the first century reader. This is especially true when using the term to discuss blessings bestowed on us by God (Eph. 1:6-7), and salvation from sin (Eph. 2:6-8).[32] "Χαρις is undoubtedly Paul's preferred leitmotiv for any full-orbed description of divine beneficence."[33] Whitlark concludes that χαρις was commonly used to discussed benefaction.[34]

The Greek term εὐεργετης (benefactor) is only found once in the New Testament (Luke 22:25). The term is used to describe the "kings of the Gentiles." At the very least, Jesus' kingdom language, and certainly his parables, indirectly suggest benefaction

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[29]James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in its Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 2-3.

[30]Harrison, 2. His footnote has word counts showing Paul's heavy use of "grace" in comparison to "mercy."

[31]Whitlark, 325. He argues for a connection between χαρις and the principle of reciprocity despite the fact that he denies reciprocity is present in Ephesians.

[32]Tablert, 44. "'Grace' was a key term in Mediterranean antiquity to designate a gift bestowed by a benefactor, human or divine."

[33]Harrison, 212. Harrison offers a detailed work on the use of χαρις.

[34]Whitlark, 333. As the fourth observation in this section's conclusion he admits that χαρις can refer to both benefaction and reciprocity.

within his kingdom.[35] The fact that this term is never used in the New Testament for God does not mean he is not pictured as a benefactor. Other terms, as the earlier discussion on χαρις reveals, are used to speak of his beneficence. Ceslas Spicq's Greek lexicon provides a helpful entry for εὐεργετης. It was commonly used, often in connection with σωτηρ, to describe gods or the emperor.[36] Spicq adds a footnote of particular interest to the use of εὐεργετης in the New Testament. He says, "Jewish inscriptions, which so often praised donors and benefactors, seem to intentionally avoid calling anyone euergetes."[37] Therefore, the absence of εὐεργετης from Paul's vocabulary does not argue against him portraying God as a benefactor.

In fact, Paul's language in Ephesians indicates he purposely presents God as a benefactor.[38] For example, "εἰς ἐπαινον δοξης της χαριτος αὐτου ἡς ἐχαριτωσεν ἡμας ἐν τωι ἠγαπημενωι"[39] (Eph. 1:6), is a clear effort to focus on God's beneficence. Paul's use of epideictic rhetoric emphasizes the glory of God. Kennedy writes,

> "epideictic is perhaps best regarded as including any discourse, oral or written, that does not aim at a specific action or decision but seeks to enhance

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[35]Neyrey, 471. "King" is listed as a term "expressive of benefaction." Consider texts like Matthew 18:21-27 where the king pardons the indebted servant.

[36]Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament,* vol. 2, trans. and ed. by James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 107-13.

[37]Spicq, 113.

[38]Neyrey, 471-74; Harrison, 212. Neyrey provides a list of common terms associated with benefaction. Paul's vocabulary included some of these terms such as πατηρ, βασιλευς, and σωτηρ. Beyond this, Harrison makes the argument that Paul's use on χαρις was his main means of focusing on God's benefaction.

[39]UBS 4th edition.

> knowledge...often through praise or blame....Most religious preaching...can be viewed as epideictic."[40]

Honorific inscriptions use demonstrative[41] rhetoric to praise benefactors and detail proper reciprocity.[42] Documents like Ephesians were originally written to be read. Letters would often include both literary features and rhetorical devices.[43] Therefore, it is not surprising that Ephesians bears similarities to honorific inscriptions. Hendrix and Danker are notable proponents in connecting Ephesian's style with honorific decree.[44] Danker says, "No document in the New Testament bears such close resemblance in its periodic style to the rhetoric of inscriptions...as does the Letter to the Ephesians."[45] While Talbert advocates benefaction and reciprocity in Ephesians, he does not agree with Hendrix and Danker regarding honorific decree. After providing elements of the basic honorific[46] he concludes, "Ephesians, however, does not conform to the formal structure

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[40]George A. Kennedy, "The Genres of Rhetoric," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 45.

[41]Kennedy, 44. He explains that demonstrative is the same as epideictic rhetoric. It involves blame or praise. Deliberative rhetoric, which most believe to be the foundation of Eph. 4-6, involves exhortation or dissuasion.

[42]Danker, Benefactor, 31. He does specifically mention epideictic rhetoric, but his description of inscriptions during the Hellenistic period fits the form.

[43]Richards, 133. "Greco-Roman letters employed many of the rhetorical devices commonly used in speeches. Paul's letters were no exception, containing both literary and oratorical devices."

[44]Hendrix, 7, 9; Danker, Benefactor, 451-452. Hendrix thesis is that Ephesians is an honorific or "epistolary decree."

[45]Danker, Benefactor, 451. He is willing to point out some weaknesses in comparing Ephesians to honorifics.

[46]Talbert, 20-21.

of the honorific decree..."[47] While basic similarities are present, Talbert's point is valid. Harrison states, "the majority of the uses of χαρις in the honorific inscriptions occur in the manifesto clause..." He explains, "the manifesto clause...sums up the response of the people, council, or association..."[48] Simply put, χαρις is tied to reciprocity in inscriptions, not benefaction.[49] Paul's use of "grace" in Ephesians centers on the activity of God, not man's response to God's generosity (Eph. 1:6-7; 2:5,7,8; 3:7-8; 4:7). The only explicit place where the saints "give grace" is found in 4:29 when they are instructed to use their words to build one another up.

The most obvious connection between Ephesians and honorifics is the use of παρακαλω in 4:1. Danker and Hendrix both emphasize this point in drawing their conclusion that Ephesians is an honorific decree.[50] This transition bridges the gap between demonstrating the honor of the benefactor and explaining the appropriate response of the beneficiaries. It signals beginning of the resolution clause. King Ptolemy II wrote a letter to the people of Miletus reminding them of his benefaction for the city. He praises them for the "good-will" he has heard they are showing toward him. He concludes by binding them to future good-will if they hope to continue to receive his benefaction. He begins this section saying, "παρακαλοῦμεν δέ καὶ είς τὸν λοιπὸγ χρόνον

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[47]Talbert, 22-23.

[48]Harrison, 40.

[49]Whitlark, 340.

[50]Hendrix, 7; Danker, Benefactor, 451.

τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχειν αἵρεσιν πρὸς ἡμᾶς..." (We summon you for the future to maintain the same policy of friendship toward us).[51]

Ephesians 1-3 bears a slight connection to Res Gestae Divi Augusti.[52] The inscription lists the many benefits Augustus provided those in the empire. Similarly, Paul demonstrates many blessings God has bestowed on those "in Christ." Hendrix and Danker make some valid points, but I am hesitant to accept the idea that Paul wrote Ephesians imitating honorific decree. While honorifics are saturated with the principle of reciprocity, there are too many structural divergences to warrant the conclusion that Ephesians is based on this model.[53] It is sufficient to recognize the general influence honorifics may have had on Paul without asserting honorifics as the basis of his style.[54] Honorific decree is only one example of the use of epideictic rhetoric to honor a benefactor.

The general use of epideictic rhetoric is obvious in the first three chapters of the Ephesian text. Witherington states, "there could be little doubt left in the hearers' minds that this was epideictic rhetoric as Paul rings the changes on eulogetos, eulogesas, and

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[51]C. B. Welles, Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1934), 71-3. Welles also provides an english translation with the Greek inscription.

[52]*Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus.* Ed. by P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). The inscription is autobiographical.

[53]Danker, Benefactor, 31. For example, the typical "whereas" conjunction that Danker claims is ordinarily part of the "tedious preamble" is not present in Ephesians.

[54]Best, 62. Bests position seems most reasonable. There is plenty of evidence to suggest multiple influences on Paul's style. There is no need to force him into one mold.

eulogia at the outset of the eulogy."[55] Reduplication and superlative language, particularly in the eulogy (Eph. 1:3-14), show epideictic form.[56] The use of relative clauses to extend sentences that describe God's grace, power, and bestowal of blessings match demonstrative rhetoric.

Paul's doxology at the end of Ephesians 3 highlights his use of demonstrative rhetoric to emphasize God as benefactor. It also serves as an appropriate transition to the exhortation that follows in Ephesians 4-6.

> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

RECIPROCITY IN EPHESIANS 4-6

Reciprocity is the term used to describe the obligation of beneficiaries toward those who displayed themselves as honorable.[57] The second half of Ephesians is dominated by the imperative. Most would suggest that Paul instructs proper response to God's honor (demonstrated in Eph. 1-3). Witherington proposes the possibility of a continuation of epideictic rhetoric in Ephesians 4-6, saying, "The question is: Is

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[55]Witherington, 229. Whether or not Ephesians is a homily in written form, as Witherington argues for, makes little difference to this argument.

[56]Witherington, 228-29. Talking about the eulogy he says, "This is a classical example of Asiatic rhetoric in its epideictic form, where amplification is accomplished by repetition of both content and form."

[57]Frederick W. Danker, "Bridging St. Paul and the Apostolic Fathers: A Study in Reciprocity," *Currents In Theology And Mission* 15 (1988):84-5. Hereafter noted as "Reciprocity."

Ephesians 4-6 essentially an attempt to laud the proper behavior and criticize improper behavior (and so an exercise in praise and blame)?"[58] Gosnell presents a similar idea in which Paul's exhortation is meant to align certain actions with honor and other actions with shame. Gosnell calls this a response to "honor challenges," and claims this is a substantial part of chapters 4-6.[59] Jeal is representative of the more common idea that Ephesians 1-3 is epideictic and is followed by deliberative rhetoric in Ephesians 4-6.[60] None of the previously mentioned models denounces the idea of reciprocity. They are different ways to understand the need for beneficiaries to respond to God's grace.

Whitlark, on the other hand, attempts to discredit the reciprocity model in Ephesians 4-6 through a study of χαρις.[61] His work, as noted above, exposes that Paul's use of χαρις does not match its use in honorific inscriptions. But he fails to prove the need to "divest the relationship with God of reciprocity by replacing it with with the notion of divine enablement."[62] Neyrey and Whitlark both quote Philo extensively to establish their positions. Whitlark offers two types of benefaction and Neyrey three types of reciprocity.[63] Their differences mainly seem a matter of semantics.

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[58]Witherington, 222.

[59]Gosnell, 111, 114-15, 120. He gives an example of a shaming challenge on page 124. It could be that Gosnell's idea matches Witherington's concept of epideictic rhetoric in chapters 4-6. Certain actions bring praise, others bring blame.

[60]Witherington, 222. He discusses Jeal's view on Ephesians (primary source not available).

[61]Whitlark, 355-57. He believes the principle of reciprocity fails to consider that God empowers the inner man to respond to God's glory.

[62]Whitlark, 326.

[63]Whitlark, 343; Neyrey, 469

Whitlark tries to jump many hurdles to argue his position. His limited view of reciprocity is the main disadvantage. His view of reciprocity always implies the concept of indebtedness.[64] At times, he struggles with consistency. For example, he admits that Philo not only discusses how to respond to God as benefactor, but uses language of reciprocity to do so. He then equivocates saying, "The best explanation for the use of the reciprocal phrase, χαριν χαριτι, is that the expression is idiomatic for an appropriate response to a gift."[65] Next, in his thesis statement, he admits the presence of benefaction in Ephesians.[66] Later, he states that "reciprocity was the foundation of the benefaction institution."[67] If the foundation of benefaction is reciprocity, how can benefaction be present in Ephesians but not reciprocity? Finally, when reciprocity language is clearly within the text, Whitlark calls it "stewardship" (Eph. 6:8).[68] It seems he has already decided that reciprocity cannot be part of Ephesians 4-6 and then puts an interpretive spin on any statement that presents difficulties to that position.

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[64]Whitlark, 325. It is clear in his introduction that indebtedness is a theological issue from the beginning. It is hard to ignore his theological bias, especially as he continually tries to redefine for the reader what certain phrases mean. This does not suggest that Neyrey is not biased; however, he does seem more objective.

[65]Whitlark, 345-346. His point about the enabling power of God working through the saints is an important observation, but it does not remove the clear language of reciprocity within Ephesians.

[66]Whitlark, 326.

[67]Whitlark, 340. He actually states the same thing within the thesis statement on page 326, "Second, the Greco-Roman institution of benefaction, based upon reciprocity..."

[68]Whitlark, 345, 347, 354-55. In 345 he says, "some notion of reciprocity must be present when appropriate responses are not dependent upon the enabling power of the benefactor but wholly depend upon the recipient. Even so, the context emphasizes the idea of stewardship over reciprocity." Again, he admits some form of reciprocity.

On the other hand, Neyrey discusses reciprocity more comprehensively and more objectively. He presents three types of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative. Neyrey describes generalized reciprocity as "'altruistic' interactions whereby the interests of 'the other are primary' (i.e., 'solidarity extreme'),"[69] balanced reciprocity as a "quid-pro-quo exhange," and negative reciprocity as "self-interest at the expense of 'the other.'"[70]

God's benefaction is a matter of his nature. He gives grace because he is gracious. "To be God means to bestow unmerited blessings and to act according to the 'solidarity extreme.'"[71] The ideal benefactor does not give with the idea of receiving in return. Neyrey admits that some benefactors gave for the purpose of receiving reward,[72] but he also points out, quoting Seneca, that the mindset of the benefactor was not that of a lender. Ideally he gave without regard for a gift in return.[73] He concludes, "Among elite thinkers, then divine benefaction is ideally described as altruistic, which we label as 'generalized reciprocity.'"[74] He then goes in great detail on how man responds properly

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[69]Neyrey, 469.

[70]Neyrey, 469.

[71]Neyrey, 470. Whitlark, 356. Whitlark agrees with this idea, and even admits that Eph. 1:3-14 is proof that saints did respond to God's grace with "praise and thanks."

[72]Neyrey, 481. Inscriptions prove this to be true. Whitlark chooses to hone in on this aspect of reciprocity. Neyrey focuses on the idea that benefaction given for gain is merely a loan, not a gift.

[73]Neyrey, 481-482; Seneca *On Benefits* 1.2.3.

[74]Neyrey, 483.

to God. Ultimately, he comes away with an answer not too different from Whitlarks.[75] Neyrey reworks a quote from Philo into his own words,

> "Gods 'give,' but mortals 'give thanks.'" For mortals have 'no power to render in return anything beyond it' and 'the property' already belongs to God. All that is left is commitment, that is, 'thanksgiving' (Praise and gratitude)."[76]

While Whitlark and Neyrey both make valid observations, Neyrey's treatment of the subject is preferable because he does not try to deny, or redefine, clear language of reciprocity within Scripture.

As Paul is urging (παρακαλω)[77] the saints to respond properly to God their benefactor he instructs them, "put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24), and "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..." (Eph. 4:32-5:2). Danker claims, "In Greco-Roman culture it is also assumed that beneficiaries will reflect the characteristics of their benefactors."[78] Paul made it clear that the reader should embody the divine character. There is no way the saints could repay, or reciprocate, the grace of God which brought them salvation. There is also no indication that God expects "grace for grace" as in a balance reciprocity model. What saints can do

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[75]Whitlark, 345. Whitlark refers to Philo's explanation of proper response to God through hymns of thanksgiving.

[76]Neyrey, 487; Philo *Noah's Work As A Planter 130.*

[77]While I do not believe honorifics are the mold for Ephesians, I do παρακαλω, possibly influenced by honorifics, marks a transition between Paul's honoring of God and his call for a proper response among the saints.

[78]Danker, Reciprocity, 87.

is honor God by putting on the new self "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

CONCLUSION

The benefaction-reciprocity model of the Mediterranean world is clearly part of Paul's language in Ephesians. But as Best indicates, there is no reason to force Ephesians into a monolithic style.[79] Paul's writing is influenced by various models. For example, his Jewish background is prominent in the letter.[80]

The real challenge in any exegesis is application to the modern world. How does Paul's letter to an honor-shame culture, based in patron-client relationships, help us understand God's will for us today? This is a question for further investigation. But I believe, as Wright implied, when we understand Paul's writing in connection to Paul's world, we are more likely to find answers to our modern questions.

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[79]Best, 62; Gosnell, 105-06. The principle of reciprocity is certainly not the only lens through which to view Ephesians. For example, Gosnell's proposal that honor-shame rhetoric unifies Ephesians is compelling.

[80]Lincoln, 10.

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