

Honor and Shame Rhetoric as a Unifying Motif in Ephesians

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New Testament scholarship increasingly recognizes the importance of honor and shame dynamics for understanding biblical texts. That recognition has not been applied to studies in Ephesians in a consistently developed way. The present article offers a detailed exploration of Ephesians' persistent regard for honor and shame. This pervasive motif unifies the epistle's varied contents. Its pervasiveness has significant implications for understanding both the purpose and content of the letter.

Key Words: Ephesians, honor, shame, status, rhetoric, convert, moral behavior

The Epistle “to the Ephesians” exhibits a strong, persistent regard for the concepts of honor and shame. Remarkably, this is rarely observed by commentators and others who write on the epistle.¹ The following study focuses on how the honor and shame motif in Ephesians unifies the developing argument of the letter. Recognizing the consistency of this motif helps inform the rhetorical situation of the epistle,² solidifying Ephesians principally as a resocializing text for new converts.³ The following article

1. One major exception is Elna Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), especially pp. 133–37. She bases her discussion on the observations found in H. Hendrix, “On the Form and Ethos of Ephesians,” *USQR* 42 (1988): 3–15. Among the more recent academic commentaries on Ephesians to have been published in English in the past decade, only one, by P. T. O’Brien, contains the word *honor* in its index. Even that merely refers to an explanation of the fifth commandment as it appears in Eph 6:2. See, e.g., E. Best, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998); H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word, 1990); P. Perkins, *Ephesians* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); P. T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); R. Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (trans. Helen Heron; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

2. For rationale supporting the exploration of rhetorical over historical situation, see R. Jeal, “Rhetorical Argumentation in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (ed. A. Eriksson, T. H. Olbricht, and W. Übekacker; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 312–16; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxiv–lxxxi; Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, 53–122.

3. For foundational concepts in this regard, especially for honor and shame, see W. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 7, 11–17, 31–36, 48–50.

attempts to show how honor and shame language, saturating every section of the letter, ties together all of its varied contents. Throughout, the letter repeatedly orients its readers toward the honored status that accrues to them as a result of their conversion.

The honor-shame framework of conduct is a behavioral phenomenon widely observable in many cultures. It governs behavioral patterns that revolve around the external response of a community to an individual's external deeds. People have honor, not merely because of their personal persistence in adhering to rigid standards of behavior, but because others in their immediate community recognize them as having honor. This orientation contrasts with a guilt framework, in which the articulation and maintenance of rules can become ends in themselves. People in those cultures more frequently tend to demonstrate a concern for internal motivations that more easily subordinates public approval to internal principle. In honor-shame cultures of the types found in the Greco-Roman world, however, one is more concerned with being perceived as "honorable by the community" than with being "honorable before one's conscience."⁴ This manner of thinking can be foreign to many Northern European oriented biblical scholars, who can easily miss interactions of this sort even when they abound in biblical texts.

New Testament scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of honor and shame dynamics in understanding NT texts.⁵ In spite of the criticism that models of honor and shame may anachronistically rely too much on data from contemporaneous Mediterranean settings,⁶ ongoing work by both classicists and biblical scholars has demonstrated how

4. David Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

5. Casual mention appears in passing comments by Leander Keck, "Rethinking New Testament Ethics," *JBL* 116 (1996): 14; and throughout the writing of Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*. The work of Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey is significant in showing the widespread relevance of honor and shame permeating NT thought. See, for example, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 25-26. See also Halvor Moxnes, "BTB Readers Guide: Honor and Shame," *BTB* 23 (1993): 167-76. Moxnes' article provides a useful update to anthropological models initially developed by Malina and Neyrey, especially with regard to the distinctiveness of "Mediterranean" honor and shame. For a presentation of experimental studies with the evaluation of the methodology by cultural anthropologists, see Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible* (*Semeia* 68; Atlanta: SBL, 1996). Significant work with these concepts appears in the writings of David deSilva, first on Hebrews, and then on elements from within the wider NT canon. See David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1995); idem, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

6. John K. Chance, "The Anthropology of Honor and Shame: Culture, Values and Practice," *Semeia* 68 (1996): 139-51; Gideon M. Kressel, "An Anthropologist's Response to the Use of Social Science Models in Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 68 (1996): 153-61. See, also, Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, 38-41.

ancient literature itself expresses and affirms honor and shame dynamics.⁷ Though aspects of honor and shame issues are well rehearsed in the literature cited thus far, certain basic issues need repeating here in order to establish a basis for the discussion on Ephesians.

THE BASIC MODEL

A culture concerned with honor-shame principles is primarily other-oriented.⁸ It gives “attentiveness to appearances” as opposed to the “attentiveness to the inner voice” prominent in guilt-oriented cultures.⁹ “Honor is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride.”¹⁰ It works together with shame and sometimes represents more of an ideal than an actual state that is consciously earned. A key operating concept here is reputation. People in honor and shame settings perform in accordance with the reputation they must maintain, or avoid. Honor and shame as categories more often refer to judgments of an individual based on performance than to an existential state.¹¹ Activities such as boasting (Eph 2:9) or expressing rage (Eph 4:26, 31) can be normal in this context, as can be activities that celebrate the honor of the praiseworthy (Eph 1:3–13).

The existence of dynamics of this sort does not mean that people in an honor-shame oriented culture cannot experience personal guilt for wrongdoing or that a person in a more guilt-oriented culture cannot be subject to honor or shame.¹² An honor-shame rather than guilt orientation does mean that, in some societies, what others think about a certain activity is

7. See, for example A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960); Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*; N. R. E. Fisher, *HYBRIS: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1992); deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 1–28. DeSilva is especially useful in showing a range of thinkers in antiquity who expressed their thoughts in the vocabulary of honor and shame.

8. The basics of this model have been worked out in the context of present-day observations within Mediterranean cultures. It is supplemented with necessary revisions from antiquity. The principles found here, however, have often provided the starting point for scholars seeking to discuss honor and shame issues in biblical texts.

9. David Daube, “Shame Culture in Luke,” in *Paul and Paulinism* (ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982), 355.

10. Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J. G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 21.

11. U. Wikan, “Shame and Honor: A Contestable Pair,” *Man* n.s. 19 (1984): 638–39.

12. R. F. Newbold observes: “Shame and guilt are difficult personality characteristics to discuss and disentangle because they can alternate with, reinforce and conceal one another. Shame is not wholly external in its orientation nor is guilt wholly internal.” R. F. Newbold, “Personality Structure and Response to Adversity in Early Christian Hagiography,” *Numen* 31 (1984): 200–201. D. Ausubel likewise notes that, “although the two kinds of sanctions are distinguishable from one another, they are nevertheless neither dichotomous nor mutually exclusive” (D. Ausubel, “Relationships between Shame and Guilt in the Socializing Process,” 378–79).

more of a controlling factor than any sense of rightness or wrongness alleged to belong to that activity. Stated “values” often conflict with actual “practices.”¹³ Though people may acknowledge that misdeeds such as adultery, murder, theft, or lying are wrong, perhaps even shameful in themselves, the mere commission of these deeds does not necessarily evoke guilt for violation of a standard or automatic loss of face. Social censorship may arise when, through an often complicated combination of cultural factors, a deed performed by a certain person in a certain way violates certain over-arching community standards. Norms are “manipulable.”¹⁴ Thus, it would be inappropriate to assume the acceptability of a straightforward propositional argument involving the delineation of right from wrong as being automatically normative, unless those norms can appear to be adjusted to the honor and shame environment. In the face of brute contradictory fact, people can sometimes defend honor merely by vehement claims to the contrary.¹⁵

Consider the dynamics found in a story well-known to the world of the NT, Homer’s *Odyssey*.¹⁶ The hero, Odysseus, is a man with a high reputation. Part of this reputation is tied to his cunning. Though within the culture at large truth-telling would be an expected norm,¹⁷ Odysseus can bend the truth for his own protection and thus increase his reputation for cunning. Thus, he can lie to the Cyclops Polyphemous about his name (Ὀδύτης, “Noman” [*sic*] or “Nohbdy” [*sic*])¹⁸ and turn this lie to his advantage when he stabs the Cyclops in the eye: Noman has hurt him. How can he do this? Because the Cyclopes, though children of the gods, are ἀθεμίσιος, “lawless,”¹⁹ and so are properly shame-able, though not without consequences, as Odysseus learns. Numerous other examples can be found throughout other surviving stories of the culture.

13. Chance, “The Anthropology of Honor and Shame,” 145. Chance articulates “Values versus Practice” as the instance when “beliefs about how things ‘ought to be’ in the view of the anthropologist’s informants are distinguished from how things ‘really happen’ as measured by the anthropologist’s own observations of behavior.”

14. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, 58.

15. Note, for example, the dynamics expressed in Acts 19:24–28, especially v. 28. The silversmiths in Ephesus shout that Artemis is great, in response to the fact that her greatness has been significantly diminished by faith in Jesus.

16. I take my cue here from Fergusson, who claims, “Homer lies at the foundation of the Greek tradition, and his prominence in the educational curriculum until the end of antiquity means that he is fundamental for Greek religious thought in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.” E. Fergusson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 139.

17. Note the general comments of L. Pearson: “It is no surprise that brutal murder and adultery are considered beyond a man’s due portion of behaviour. Deceit and overconfidence are censured in the same terms.” L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 40.

18. *Odyssey* 9.366. The translation “Noman” is from A. T. Murray (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). The translation “Nohbdy” is from R. Fitzgerald, *The Odyssey* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 156.

19. *Odyssey* 9.106.

What make such complex interactions possible are the multiple contingencies associated with the maintenance of reputation. Dependent on who is performing for whom, in what circumstances, and for what reasons, standards of right or wrong appear erratic to those who are outside the culture in question. Heroes always remain heroes, regardless of what they do, even if an activity they perform could by itself be considered shameful.²⁰ Ephesians stands out in such an environment by portraying certain activities such as anger or lying always to be dishonorable for those who belong to the honorable God, even though the culture at large can find circumstances in which they can be condoned. The sense of right and wrong is associated with God, who is portrayed as offering a sharply contrasting set of behavioral standards (Eph 4:20–24; 5:5–8; 5:17).

Because honor and shame are dependent on the responses of others, they are closely associated with status. Pitt-Rivers, for example, notes that “the right to pride is the right to status, . . . and status is established through the recognition of a certain social identity.”²¹ Without others to recognize status, there is no honor to be recognized either. However, honor can also be related to the fact of birth, which is beyond an individual’s performance.²² The status that a person has can often determine the standards of honor to which the public may hold the person. But there must be a public to recognize the person.

D. deSilva refers to this public as “the court of reputation” and points out that one reality making this court ambiguous for the Greco-Roman world is found in the multiplicity of cultures brought together within the Roman Empire.²³ A given city can realistically have a wide cross-section of culture groups with competing senses of honored behavior. What is honorable for one group may be shameful for another. While this would not be the sole explanation of varied dynamics within the Greco-Roman world, it is an important factor to bear in mind, especially when considering literature written for new converts to a new kind of faith. In Ephesians God appears as a major member of the “public” forum before whom reputation can be established.²⁴ Ephesians’ regard for God as a being who can confer

20. Contemporaneous examples of behavior of this sort can be found in the writings of Wikan, “Shame and Honor: A Contestable Pair,” 639–46; and M. Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 20–21 and 36–45. The former gives an example of an adulteress who maintains honor by showing hospitality with her lover’s gifts. The latter records how men steal in order to make allies.

21. Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” 22.

22. Brandes, “Reflections on Honor and Shame in the Mediterranean,” 128.

23. DeSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 3–8.

24. For further elaboration on the way this works out in Pauline circles, consider W. Meeks, “The Circle of Reference in Pauline Morality,” in *Greeks, Romans and Christians* (ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson and W. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 306–9. That God, for New Testament writings, is the ultimate public before whom honor is to be sought is also the conclusion of Moxnes, “BTB Readers Guide: Honor and Shame,” 175.

honor or shame further underscores God as a central figure for the writing's honor and shame concerns.

Again, to refer to the *Odyssey*, one can observe that the expectations of appropriate behavior for Odysseus change situationally from his masquerading as a beggar to his eventual disclosure as the returned ruler. As a beggar, he is subject to the bounds of what beggars do and must assert his place in the beggars' pecking order in his conflict with his fellow beggar, "Iros." But when he is revealed as the returned king, the dynamics change, and the people of Ithaca either accept him in his full authority or else resist that authority, which is perceived to have diminished both on account of his long absence and eventually on account of his vengeful slaughter of their kinsmen, who themselves had refused to give Odysseus his rightful honor.²⁵ Social position may sometimes reflect the kind of behavior expected. In the world of Ephesians, the new kind of status said to exist for its converted readership serves as the foundation for a distinct sense of honorable behaviors. This status is to trump all other honor-conferring settings. What God is said to think about certain behaviors is all that matters.

Often the relationship between status and honor is discussed in terms of two kinds of honor: ascribed and acquired. I refrain from using these labels in this paper. First, they seem to have been developed by non-anthropologists in the use of anthropological models for biblical studies.²⁶ Major anthropologists writing on honor and shame in the Mediterranean do not appear to use them.²⁷ Second, one must distinguish between agonistic activity that can appear in a particular honor-shame environment, and the kinds of agonistic activities in which one must engage because of status. The sphere of honor in which one must function is tied to publicly

25. These dynamics unfold in the *Odyssey*, books 18–24. In a more contemporaneous Mediterranean setting, dynamics of this sort are captured with the following quotation: "Families with exceedingly little prestige have no honour however noble they may in fact be: you could copulate with his daughter, they say of a poor man, and he would hold your coat." J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 95.

26. See Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 29. The same terminology is used by G. M. Corrigan, "Paul's Shame for the Gospel," *BTB* 16 (1986): 24–25; and reappears in Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke–Acts," 27–28. and in Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Semeia* 68 (1996): 115–18. Moxnes ("BTB Readers Guide: Honor and Shame," 175) likewise picks it up.

27. One apparent exception seems to be Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," 22, when he says: "If honour establishes status, the converse is also true, and where status is ascribed by birth, honour derives not only from individual reputation but from antecedence." Note that Pitt-Rivers refers to status as ascribed by birth. This is not equivalent to saying that honor is ascribed by birth. He is not saying that honor is ascribed. He is saying that the honor boundaries within which an individual may function are. Even Pitt-Rivers's discussion of the honor of precedence versus the honor of virtue is not in strict "ascribed" versus "acquired" dichotomies. Pitt-Rivers's point is that there can be a tension between what one claims and what one may then try to earn or demonstrate.

acknowledged social standing and expectations. Further, expectations are often governed by complicated patterns that defy easy categorization.²⁸ The labels *ascribed* and *acquired* seem to be an outsider's designations rather than a means of clarifying indigenous, working concepts. In the thought world of Ephesians, the readers are said to have received a new form of status from their conversion. The writer presents a new set of responsibilities to match the honor that readers now have by virtue of this conversion. This honor is both ascribed and acquired.

Honor challenges play an important role in many honor and shame settings.²⁹ When one receives a challenge to one's honor, one feels compelled to defend it. These challenges are not always negative. They can come in a variety of forms, from taunts to put-downs to comparisons to exhortations. In order to live honorably, one must answer challenges. This sort of activity dominates Ephesians. The second half of the letter consists largely of exhortations. Although all exhortations are not by definition challenges, the language of Ephesians does present much of its exhortation this way.

With regard to Ephesians, therefore, the following issues become important to consider. There is a regard for reputation and status permeating the entire letter. This regard is directly related to the God who has established new honor to be celebrated by those who belong to "him."³⁰ This God has the highest reputation and status in the community celebrating him. This God also has a reputation that is unseen, in the "heavenlies." The reputation of this God competes with activities that may be considered reputable outside the sphere of the individuals who consider themselves to belong to him. So, there is a single reference point for approval and disapproval of activities: God; and a proper, honoring view of this God. Further, the reputation that the readers themselves have before this God becomes an important focus. This God is capable of conferring reputation on others, effecting what he thinks of them. These thoughts offer strong motivation for the readers' own behavior. The readers are challenged to maintain their honor. Implied within these dynamics is a sense of the reputation that the readers may have before each other. Honor maintenance and shame avoidance between fellow believers does come into play, though

28. To see how complicated honorific behavioral expectations can become, consider the descriptions found in the following: Julio Caro Baroja, "Honour and Shame: A Historical Account of Several Conflicts," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J. G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965), 81–137; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society," in *ibid.*, 193–241; Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 37–52. The Bourdieu article is often cited in discussions on "acquired" honor, yet the examples in all of those writings show highly complex social activity that could undermine a straightforward ascribed-acquired distinction.

29. Often this is discussed under the category of "challenge-riposte." See Moxnes, "BTB Readers Guide: Honor and Shame," 173–74; Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts," 29–32; and deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 10.

30. Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from the Bible are from the NRSV.

at a level secondary to what God is said to be thinking of them or to what they should be thinking about God. Absent from the letter, however, is any sense of what communities outside of adherents to the faith may think about them. Honor or shame before outsiders never overtly factors into the concerns of the letter.³¹

HONOR AND SHAME IN EPHESIANS: INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

The honor and shame motif appears in every section of the letter. By focusing on this motif, one can recognize a greater sense of rhetorical unity to the letter than is generally considered. The honor and shame motif in Ephesians does not explain why the letter addresses its points: its unique ecclesiology and Christology, its liturgical concerns, its apparent common-places both in its moral instruction and its household material, its power language. But the honor and shame language does provide a unity to the writing that allows its many distinct issues to hang together.

Ephesians is often portrayed as a letter in two halves, one “doctrinal” or “theological” and the other “practical” or “hortatory.”³² In this regard, the second half is seen as a practical outworking of its theology. Attempts to link the two halves have often faltered when the scholar recognizes that connections between the letter’s theology and ethics are neither as developed nor as consistent as in other Pauline writings.³³ Without attempting an exhaustive listing of every suggestion of the linkage between the two halves of the letter, I offer the following as representative possibilities from the many explorations of terms, themes, and motifs from the first half taken up in the second: unity (in the first half: 2:11–22; in the second half: 4:1–16, 25, 5:30);³⁴ the walk motif (in the first half: 2:2, 10; in the second half: 4:1, 17, 5:2, 5:8, 15); the once-now schema (in the first half: 2:1–10; 2:11–22; 3:8–12; in the second half: 4:22–24; 5:8);³⁵ love (in the first half: 1:4, 6, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 19; in the second half: 4:2, 15, 16; 5:1, 2 [twice], 25 [twice], 28 [three times], 33; 6:21, 23, 24);³⁶ fullness and all-in-all language (in the

31. This stands behind Best’s observation that Ephesians shows no regard for reaching out to outsiders. Best, *Ephesians*, 636–37, 947–48.

32. Note, e.g., Best, *Ephesians*, 353; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 61; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 66. Useful modifications of this appear in Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xxxvi–xxxvii; and Perkins, *Ephesians*, 94.

33. A useful, concise explanation of the problem may be found in R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000), 1–13.

34. Consider K. Usami, *Somatic Comprehension of Unity: The Church in Ephesus* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1983).

35. Consider P. Tachau, “*Einst*” und “*Jetzt*” im Neuen Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 126–43, with revisions by Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 86–88.

36. Hoehner has developed this more fully in his recent commentary but runs into the same problems as others, in that he is only able to show love as a major term in the letter, not one that actually evinces a conscious developing concern. See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 104–6.

first half: 1:10, 23; 3:19; in the second half: 4:10);³⁷ power language (in the first half: 1:19–23; 3:15–23; in the second half: 6:10–20).³⁸ In spite of the repetitions of these motifs, what appears in the second half of the letter does not appear as a conscious development of ideas found in the first half.

More successful links between the two halves do emerge from the various attempts at recognizing rhetorical development within the letter. Thus, Jeal has described how the *exordium* found in 1:3–14; 1:15–23; 3:1, 14–19; and 3:20–21 combined with the *narratio* of 2:1–22 prepare the hearers for the *exhortatio* of 4:1–6:20.³⁹ The readers are being emotionally set up by the first half of the letter to carry out the kinds of activities found in the second. The various expressions of the first half “are used rhetorically to produce a sense of identification and personal involvement that moves the audience to collaborate with the author’s goal” of living appropriate Christian lives.⁴⁰ When common motifs, themes, and vocabulary from the first half are repeated in the second, they appear in a manner that reflects prior conditioning rather than conscious, consistent development.

Though not following the strict references to rhetorical elements, Mouton comes to similar conclusions about the unity of the two halves of the letter.⁴¹ Developing a bit further a thesis first introduced by Hendrix that Ephesians corresponds to the honorific declaration of a communal benefactor’s monument, she affirms the first half of the letter as an epideictic preparation for the deliberative second half, where honor from God as benefactor is established as the foundation for the obligation of performing the prescribed deeds. Hendrix and Mouton are two important proponents of an approach to Ephesians that shows regard for honor and shame issues. Neither one, however, demonstrates the specific ways that this approach is applied to the language of the entire letter.

Thus I offer the following as an outgrowth of a rhetorical regard for honor and shame. Without delving into the specifics of rhetorical development as Jeal does, I wish to accept the basic premise of his approach that the first half prepares the reader for the second.⁴² Without accepting the premise that Ephesians parallels the honorific proclamation of a benefactor, I

37. Consider J. Ernst, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi: Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffs der paulinischen Antilegomena* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1970).

38. Consider C. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

39. This is developed through the entire book. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians*. For a less-detailed overview, see his shorter article, “Rhetorical Argumentation in the Letter to the Ephesians,” 310–24.

40. *Ibid.*, 324.

41. See, especially Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, 127–37.

42. This approach is similar to that of Mouton’s in *ibid.*, 123–31. One can surmise a basic pattern to be a part of the cultural fabric of letter writing without having to suppose the strict application of patterns as coming from a trained rhetor. In this regard, the caution proposed by Kern is worth considering, even if one wishes to trace how formal rhetorical patterns in general inform NT letters. See P. H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul’s Epistle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

wish to explore the ways that the sense of honor developed in the first half of the letter establishes the basis for the honor lifestyle challenges that appear in the second.⁴³ But a sense of honor is not appealed to in overt language to create a “social” or “moral obligation to honor” God as “benefactor,”⁴⁴ however much Ephesians does in fact contain patron and benefaction concepts and vocabulary.⁴⁵ Neither is God’s benefaction appealed to principally to arouse gratitude, as it is at times in other NT letters.⁴⁶ Instead in Ephesians, the vocabulary of honor and shame celebrates the establishment of the new status enjoyed by Gentile converts and appeals to the exaltedness of this status as a basis for the behavior being enjoined. If there is a feeling or obligation, it is on the part of the readers, who themselves may be used to responding with obeisance when confronted with benefactions.⁴⁷ The words themselves do not appeal to a sense of obligation; they appeal to the readers’ presumed desire to respond to honor challenges.

THE HONOR AND SHAME ARGUMENT: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

Consider first the honor and shame vocabulary found within the letter: “glory” (δόξα—1:6, 12, 14, 17, 18; 3:13, 16, 21); “wealth, rich” (πλούτος, πλουσιος—1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16); “the very least” (NRSV) (ἐλαχιστότερος—3:8, “leaster”); “worthily” (ἀξίως—4:1); “shame, shameful” (αἰσχρότης, αἰσχος—5:4, 12); “splendor” (ἐνδοξος—5:27); “honor” (τιμάω—6:2). These are the most obvious examples.⁴⁸ They constitute a terminology of valuation expressing either enhancement or denigration of another’s reputation.

Now consider, briefly, how the honor argument unfolds. The writer begins by calling on his readers to extol God’s honor, of whose honor-

43. The criticisms of that position by Best (*Ephesians*, 62) and Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 76) need to be considered here. Ephesians is not a decree but a homily, according to Best, or a letter, according to Hoehner.

44. Contra Mouton and Hendrix. See Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, 135.

45. I do not wish to be misconstrued as denying the value of a study of patronage and benefactor issues in Ephesians. Ephesians most definitely portrays God as benefactor, and a study with regard to this topic would be quite valuable. But this is not the focus of the present essay because the vocabulary of the letter does not consistently depict God as benefactor in the second half of the letter in links to the ample references to this motif in the first half. For a basic orientation to ways of connecting patronage to honor and shame, see deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 11–12.

46. See, e.g., deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 11–12; idem, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 61–62. That this strategy exists outside biblical texts is obvious from Seneca, *Ben.* 2.29.4–6. There, Seneca condemns human ingratitude toward divinely bestowed benefits.

47. This may be what deSilva is trying to convey with his observation that gratitude itself was an expected obligation in Roman society in response to the receiving of a benefaction. See deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 11–12.

48. Along with δόξα and τιμάω, εὐλογέω (1:3), ὑποτάσσω (1:22; 5:21, 24), φοβέομαι (5:33), and ὑπακούω (6:5) are considered by Mouton to be the main honor terms (*Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, 137).

establishing activities they have become prime beneficiaries (1:3–14). The writer considers God’s reputation to be the highest of any being either in heaven or earth and calls on his readers to join him in this recognition. He then prays for them to comprehend the surpassing honor of the ascended, lordly Christ (1:15–23). Having established Christ’s honor, he contrasts the readers’ preconversion shame before God with their new status: they take part in the same honor as Jesus, having participated with Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension (2:1–10). Not only this, but they enjoy a new, honored status both before God and among themselves as members of a new expression of the people of God (2:11–22). The writer, “Paul,”⁴⁹ himself likewise delights in his own new, undeserved status, which is of benefit to them (3:1–13). After praying for God’s honor to be further conferred on his readers and upheld in Christ and his church (3:14–21, esp. vv. 20–21), the writer then issues a series of honor challenges that ultimately call on his readers to rise to the level of their new status in their daily conduct. Those challenges dominate the content of the rest of the letter (4:1–6:20).

Throughout the letter, the writer moves his readers through a wide array of topics and issues. But all of them hang together with the strong cords of honor and shame. God has given the readers great honor, says the writer. They should not let it be besmirched. Rather, they should uphold this honor in the way they live.

THE HONOR AND SHAME ARGUMENT: A DETAILED OVERVIEW

Thumbnail sketches often run the risk of neglecting details that may appear to undermine them. So, it is necessary to present more specifically how the details support the general overview just expressed.

Ephesians 1:3–14

The letter begins by honoring God.⁵⁰ The opening *berakah* establishes God as praiseworthy and extols his activities of blessing “in Christ” the “saints . . . and faithful in Christ Jesus” “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3). The readers and writer together are direct beneficiaries of God’s generosity.⁵¹ They are to join in their recognition of God as one most worthy of praise, celebrating his high reputation.

This sets the tone for the remainder of the opening, which is focused on God’s activities “in Christ.” God’s choice of readers and writer, and his

49. Though I myself regard Paul as the author of this letter, I do not wish to make authorship an issue for this discussion.

50. See deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 15–19 for an overview of the rhetorical use of praise and blame in proclaiming honor, as well as Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, 137.

51. Note the discussion on the rhetorical sense of inclusion evoked by the change from “we” to “you” (Best, *Ephesians*, 147–48; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 37).

elevation of them to the status of adopted children show God's kind intentions and enhance the greatness of ("to the praise of") "his glorious grace" (εις ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, 1:6), grace that has been emitted extravagantly. This grace of God "freely bestowed" on them in Christ the beloved is utterly honorable. Further, God's redemption and forgiveness directly resulting from Christ's activities are also governed by "the riches of his grace" (κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, 1:7). God's wisdom in making Christ the focal point of his activities and God's sealing of his people with his Spirit additionally is said to serve the purpose of causing all believers, ultimately, to exist "to the praise of his glory" (1:12, 13–14). All of these grand activities, according to the writer, directly advance the greatness of God's reputation. However much the readers and writer benefit from them, the writer wants his readers to know principally that these activities make God look great.

The *berakah* also introduces a distinctive set of social dynamics. Rather than being public, for all to see, those blessings enumerated by the writer are confined to the "heavenlies." Thus, from the opening, the writer is leading his readers in a distinct direction. Although honor normally concerns how one is perceived by others, Ephesians directs its readers to consider how honor also exists in an unseen realm. God's "spiritual" blessings are not necessarily directly visible. "Saints" can know this honor and proclaim it among themselves, even as the writer does for them in his *berakah*. But the general public is not the arena to which the writer appeals for his focus on the greatness of God's honor. It is the focus on what can only be known as honorable by members of a specially privileged community, however widespread geographically the adherents may be, that reinforces Ephesians as a resocializing document.

Ephesians 1:15–23

At this point the writing shifts its emphasis from God's honored activity in Christ toward a description of Christ's honored, exalted status "in the heavenlies." The writer does so in a prayer for his readers, inviting them to expand their own understanding of Christ and his activities. God's praiseworthy accomplishments through Christ have astounding benefits for the readers. Building from his prayer in a loosely chiasmic manner, the writer portrays how Christ, both from his position of exaltation and in the process of his getting there, confers direct benefits to the readers as converts to the faith. The writer appeals to the most honorable God as the "Father of glory" who can open the readers' hearts to know him (1:17–18). The three aspects of the prayer—the hope of their calling (1:18), the "riches" of God's "glorious" inheritance composed of his "saints" (1:18)⁵² and God's overwhelmingly, honorably great power (1:19)—all receive further elabo-

52. The writer's emphasis here appears to be the fact that the saints themselves are the inheritance rather than the fact that they have received one. See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 59–60; pace Best, *Ephesians*, 167.

ration in reverse order: God's power, which is "for us who believe" is shown in what he did with Christ (1:20–23); his richness is conferred onto believers (2:1–10);⁵³ those without hope now have a never-before-imagined standing with God (2:11–22).⁵⁴ At the core of God's activities is Christ, the overwhelming exhibition of God's grand power, which is displayed chiefly in the resurrection of Christ and in his placement in the ultimate exalted position "in the heavenlies," at God's "right hand" with "all" possible controlling entities in subjection to him (1:20–22). The writer heaps honorific superlative upon superlative.

Ephesians 2:1–10

The writer connects the readers directly with this honored, heavenly status. He begins with a series of repeated reminders of their prior-to-conversion shame. They were "dead" in trespasses and sins that dominated their lives (2:1). They were ruled by the devil himself, unable to break away from fleshly, sensual lusts (2:4) as offspring of shameful "wrath." All of this shame is said to have changed for them at the in-breaking of God's honoring activities. The new honor they receive is presented as stemming from the wealth of God, a wealth in regard to his mercy, love, and grace toward the shamefully weak. God, in that wealth, has conferred the very same status of the lordly Christ upon the undeserving who have responded to him by faith, making them valuable creations for performing good works. Boasting,⁵⁵ a chief prerogative of the honored, is proscribed in recognition of God as the sole accomplisher of the work. The proscription against boasting, then, would not be addressing the traditional "faith"-versus-"works" dialogue so often imposed on vv. 8–9 but would, rather, serve to motivate converts to recognize the astounding scope of God's honoring activities. The "saints" have done nothing to enhance their reputation before God. Prior to their faith, their conduct denigrated it. God has displayed his great honor by conferring status on the undeserving, making them trophies of his grace (2:7). Further, the value of this status is long-lived, a direct testimony of God's grace and love for "the ages to come" (2:7). From a state of shameful deadness, both writer and readers have experienced a glorious enlivening. Though formerly dead, they now live with Christ. Though former, full participants in an earthly system

53. Note the term *πλοῦτος* in 1:18 with its next occurrence in 2:7, preceded by its adjectival expression in 2:4.

54. Note *ἐλπὶς* in 1:18, with its next occurrence in 2:12.

55. Normally, "boasting" is addressed in conjunction with the appropriateness or inappropriateness of considering some sort of alleged Jewish merit system as standing behind the comments. See A. T. Lincoln, "Ephesians 2:8–10: A Summary of Paul's Gospel?" *CBQ* 45 (1983): 622–23 for a brief discussion and refutation of possibilities of this sort. The perspective taken in this article is that honor and shame dynamics should always be recognized first in this letter, before ideological considerations. Thus, the writer is not anachronistically addressing semi-Pelagian, self-help tendencies of his readers but interacting with the normal practices of an honor establishment.

under the ruler of this age, they now enjoy a seat “in the heavenlies” with the exalted Christ. This honor is conferred solely by God, the honorable.

Ephesians 2:11–22

Beginning with this point, a second avenue of status is pursued. This avenue does not emerge from the content of the preceding verses, unlike the status of 2:1–10 in relation to 1:20–23, where Christ’s heavenly status is also conferred on believers. It is connected more loosely, both by the centrality of Christ as God’s primary agent and by the repetition of the once-now schema.⁵⁶ But the line of thought remains consistent with the entire epistle to this point in its appeal to an honor and shame motif. The writer appeals both to his Gentile readers’ prior-to-conversion existence and to the general pre-Christ Gentile history of shameful alienation from God. He contrasts that prior status with the new, honored status his readers enjoy as “co-” inheritors with Jewish saints in God’s new, honored building. In his typical, pleonastic fashion, the writer heaps up lists of shaming attributes: “Gentiles,” “uncircumcision,”⁵⁷ “aliens,” “strangers,” “having no hope,” “without God,” “far off” (2:11–12). The emerging picture diverges sharply from this shameful state. The crucifixion of Jesus has brought about a fundamental change in status for those of non-Israelite heritage. Instead of being far off from God, they are reconciled to him. Instead of being non-citizens of Israel’s “commonwealth” they are now co-inheritors with the “saints” of a new, unified humanity. With a series of οἰκ- compounds, the writer gushes with a superfluity of words that convey the new honor from God that is now enjoyed by the readers, an honor in the presence both of God and of their fellow believers. At the core of this status is Christ himself, the “cornerstone.”⁵⁸

Ephesians 3:1–13

The section spanning 3:1–13 is regularly regarded as a digression, prompting some to puzzle about its rhetorical function in the letter.⁵⁹ But in the context of honor and shame issues, the digression serves a valuable rhetorical purpose. The writer, “Paul,” celebrates his own special receipt of gracious status at the hands of a wealthy God. This example contributes some personal ethos to the overall presentation. The writer inserts his unique persona as a fellow celebrant of the undeserved acts of God. He recounts his own personal shame, not only as a prisoner for Christ, but as

56. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians*, 147–48.

57. Perhaps in this context the crudity of being called “foreskin,” the actual definition of ἀκροβυστία, is also being evoked. The fact that the term appears initially exclusively in Jewish contexts to refer to outsiders increases the likelihood of a pejorative connotation. For the exclusive use of the term, see K. L. Schmidt, “ἀκροβυστία” *TDNT* 1:225–26.

58. “Capstone” is also a possible translation here. See the discussion in Best, *Ephesians*, 284–86. Whether this translation is more honorific than “cornerstone” remains to be explored.

59. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians*, 163–65.

“the very least of all saints,” who now has the honor of proclaiming God’s manifold greatness. He also connects himself with the special privilege of making known the “mystery” that had formerly been hidden from previous generations. He emphasizes to an extreme the undeserved commission of God he has received⁶⁰ while also elevating the nature of the message he is allowed to proclaim by tying it to the “boundless riches of Christ” (3:8). He sees this role as facilitating for authorities “in the heavenlies” further awareness of God’s great honor, this time expressed as his “wisdom” that is “rich in variety” (3:10). The readers have experienced an undeserved change in status. So has the writer, who lets his readers know that his low, earthly status as prisoner is not only connected with the advancement of God’s honor but with the promotion of their own δόξα (3:11–13).

Ephesians 3:14–21

The first half of the letter ends with the writer invoking God to have his honor perpetuated in the church and in Christ Jesus. In a show of humility before the honored God, the writer “bows [his] knees” to the one whom he considers the giver of all status, as one who names (3:14–15).⁶¹ He prays for God, in alignment with the “riches of his glory” (3:16), to provide the readers, along with all of God’s honored—the “saints”—with special strength and comprehension of God (3:18). Though other aspects of the prayer are certainly important to explore, the point here is to recognize that honor remains as a persistent motif. So, when the writer’s benediction appeals to God’s “glory” to “be in the church and in Christ Jesus” (3:20–21), it does more than connect two major theological topics of the first half, Christ and the church.⁶² The writer displays his persistent regard both for God’s honor and for the honor of believers. His desire is that God’s reputation be advanced, both in Christ and in those connected to Christ, that is, the church. In this way, he moves beyond liturgical formula. To a certain degree, the writer has prepared his readers to see ways for this prayer to be answered directly as they heed the diverse exhortations of 4:1–6:20. God’s reputation certainly is enhanced when those honored by him do what he wants.

Ephesians 4:1–6:20: An Introductory Overview

Against the honorific, elevating background of 1:3–3:21, the letter begins its hortatory segment. The instruction is quite varied: advocating two types of churchly unity (4:1–6 and 4:7–16); contrasting inappropriate Gentile lifestyle to Christ-like love (4:17–5:2); presenting basically unrelated

60. Three times in these verses he appeals to God’s “grace,” while also talking about this four times as a “gift” being “given”: 3:2, 7, 8.

61. On names and status, see deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 19.

62. For further elaboration on “ecclesiology” and its connections to Christ in the first half of the letter, see Best, *Ephesians*, 627–32.

sententious sayings in between (4:25–32); further detailing other forms of unrighteous and righteous behavior (5:3–14); contrasting wisdom and folly (5:15–20); instructing the household (5:21–6:9); and portraying spiritual battle armor (6:10–20).

In the unfolding of the variation, each section punctuates its instruction with honor challenges. Challenges of this sort are frequent in honor and shame settings. They serve the purpose of threatening the one being challenged with some form of shame if the challenge is not addressed. Consider the challenges found in Ephesians: “live worthily of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1); “that is not the way you learned Christ!” (4:20); “as is proper among saints” (5:3); “it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly” (5:12); “so do not be foolish” (5:17); “honor your father and mother” (6:1); “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power” (6:10). Challenges may also be implied in statements such as the following: “as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:2); “so as to present the church to himself in splendor” (5:27). These comments appeal to the honoring activities of Christ as an honorable pattern to which the readers are encouraged to aspire. The sense of honor may be more overtly developed in some sections than in others. But together, the overall message is quite powerful. The first half of the letter celebrates aspects of the status that Gentile converts to faith in Christ enjoy. The second half issues honor challenges to its readers to live up to that status by conforming to various ethical norms. Failure to do so on their part may evoke shame. But compliance with the norms is a culturally expected response of those who know they have received special honor.

Ephesians 4:1–16

Though section 4:1–16 begins with a general, summarizing challenge that sets the direction for the exhortations to follow,⁶³ the challenge quickly particularizes to an exhortation toward church unity. As he proceeds, the writer appeals to qualities that together enhance community solidarity for the honored saints. Yet these qualities go counter to general norms of the culture at large, where self-aggrandizement is necessitated by the need to maintain honor both for oneself and one’s community. The qualities en-

63. The expression *παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς* is widely recognized as a common Greek construction marking the transition from one segment of a letter to another—sometimes, but not always, indicating logical dependence on what has preceded. See the representative discussions in M. Barth, *Ephesians 4–6* (AB 34A; New York: Doubleday, 1974), 426; Best, *Ephesians*, 361–62; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 333; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 226–27, 234; C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1973), 137; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 161–62. Also, see D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 188. Here, the dependence appears more evocative than logical. For example, the term *κλήσις* in 4:1 does not draw on the development of specific ideas present in its prior appearance in 1:18 but, rather, on the general atmosphere found throughout the first three chapters.

joined by the writer include “humility,” “gentleness,” “patience,” and “forbearance in love” (4:2).⁶⁴ They emphasize a regard for others, even at the expense of one’s personal reputation. But they are qualities that honor God, the most reputable one.

Because the whole letter to this point has been a celebration of the special, grand status belonging to God and those associated with him through Christ, the writer’s advocating a distinctive direction of behavior for people with exalted status should appear as no surprise. True, other communities in the Greco-Roman world had their own regard for unity in their midst.⁶⁵ But the exhortation in Eph 4:3 is founded on the expressions of oneness stemming from the great God himself (4:4–6). That the readers are to be diligent to “maintain” unity implies an already existing entity. That 2:11–22 discusses this entity is unmistakable. But rather than carry forward the thoughts of 2:11–22, Eph 4:3 challenges its readership to uphold what has previously been portrayed as a bestowal of honor.

When the direction of the concern for unity shifts in 4:7, even there the regard for honor remains paramount. It is one who has “ascended” who is responsible for giving the gifts that come under discussion.⁶⁶ The goal of the “service”⁶⁷ stemming from the “gifts” is a lofty “measure of the full stature of Christ” (4:13). By heeding the ministry of the “gifts,” the readers are to become adults (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον), not shamed with the label of children being influenced by the shameful wives of crafty deceivers (4:13–14). They are to grow up “into him who is the head, into Christ” (4:15).

Ephesians 4:17–5:2

The next section to be considered, 4:17–5:2,⁶⁸ begins with the writer’s appeal to his honorable Lord’s authority: “Now this I affirm and insist on in

64. On humility, the discussion by K. Wengst is most helpful. See Wengst, *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1988). On the uniqueness in Second Temple Jewish literature of terms for “gentleness,” “patience,” and “forbearance,” consult the following: W. Bauder, “Humility, Meekness,” *NIDNTT* 2:256–59; F. Hauck and S. Schulz, “πραῦς, πραῦτης,” *TDNT* 6:645–51; U. Falkenroth and C. Brown, “μακροθυμία,” *NIDNTT* 2:768–72; U. Falkenroth and C. Brown, “ἀνέχομαι,” *NIDNTT* 2:765–67.

65. Consider, for example, Plutarch, *Mor.* 329B. For a collection of remarks of this sort, see E. A. Judge, “Contemporary Political Models for the Inter-Relations of the New Testament Churches,” *RTR* 22 (1963): 65–76.

66. Regardless of what one thinks Christ’s descent refers to, the honor of the exalted Christ lends special significance to the “gifts” being given. For a discussion of possibilities on the descent of Christ issue, see H. Harris, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7–11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

67. Again, regardless of whether one inserts a comma between “saints” and “for” in 4:12, inattention to self and help for others remains central. For a discussion of relevant issues, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253–55; and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 547–51.

68. Admittedly, grouping all of these verses together as a unit is unusual. The norm among commentators is to treat 4:17–24 and 4:25–5:2 (or 4:25–32). The point here is not to argue for a novel way of recognizing the structure of Ephesians. Rather, it is to recognize that there is a form of overall movement from a negative (not like Gentiles) to a positive (like Christ) in the content of the exhortation. This movement itself is suggested by 4:22–24, a point

the Lord" (4:17). From that the writer proceeds to paint a shameful picture. After urging that his readers "no longer live as the Gentiles live" (4:17), the writer describes what he considers to be typical Gentile behavior in demeaning terms: "futility of their minds," "darkened in understanding," "alienated from the life of God, "in ignorance and hardness of heart," having "abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" (4:17–19).⁶⁹ Though the specifics differ, the portrait resembles the description of shameful, preconverted people in both 2:1–3 and 2:11–12 by conveying the same attitude of shame toward the unconverted.

Following this comes the challenge, "That is not the way you learned Christ!" (4:20). At this point the flow of thought in the section begins to move toward the honor associated with "the truth" (4:21, 24) that is "in Jesus" (4:21) and toward the "new self" created in conformity with the honorable God (κατά θεόν, 4:24). The exhortations that follow contrast behaviors that are shame-evoking with those that reflect the readers' new status. Some of the activities being proscribed, especially anger, lying, and theft, are known in some honor and shame settings to represent positive displays of honor.⁷⁰ Here, they are thoroughly forbidden. The writer is portraying a new sense of what evokes honor and shame for believers in Jesus. However much some of that may have touch-points with aspects of the world of Greco-Roman moral philosophers,⁷¹ the overall picture that emerges here is one that advocates a distinct sense of propriety that is related to the God with whom the readers are now associated. The climax of the section is a call to imitate the forgiveness and love of the honored God (4:31–5:1). The warrant for this call is found in the love of the honored Christ, whose giving of himself in love for those who believe in him is declared to be an act of honoring worship to God himself (5:2).

often noted. See Best, *Ephesians*, 443–44; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 293 and 300. Consider Perkins, *Ephesians*, 103.

69. This appears to be a form of "nihilation" of the converts' former existence "to secure the convert's singleminded [*sic*] dependence upon the new community as the sole source for guidance and support" (Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 36).

70. See the prior discussion of Odysseus and deception in the section discussing the "Basic Model" (above, p. 108). With regard to rage, one can also observe other moments in this story where rage appears as the natural response for protection of one's reputation. See, for example, Odysseus's response (ὀχθήσας—being thoroughly angered) when he thinks his special bed has been removed from his home (*Od.* 23. 180). Similar dynamics have been found in other settings. See Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, 96; Herzfeld, *Poetics of Manhood*, 16; Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," 32–35. The use of the present participle κλέπτον may indicate that stealing was being perceived as an ongoing activity allowed in some settings. See E. Best, "Ephesians 4:28: Thieves in the Church," *IBS* 14 (1992): 4–5. The writer of the epistle sees no possibility for allowing such activity.

71. For example, Epictetus can speak ill of anger (*Diatr.* 1.18.2–4) and theft (*Diatr.* 1.29.21; 2.23.15). Dio Chrysostom sees anger (*Orat.* 1.13) and lying (*Orat.* 1.33) as unfit behavior for kings, deriving his lessons from Homer. Though from an earlier period, Plato excoriates similar activity: for example, lying (*Laws* 730C) and theft (*Laws* 934D–935A). Meeks (*The Origins of Christian Morality*, 15, 18–36) touches on a variety of lifestyle issues that could be seen as intersecting with elements of Christian morality.

Ephesians 5:3–14

This section is striking in its appeal to honor and shame concepts. Shamefulness is one of a series of behaviors that the readers are forbidden to discuss (5:4). Such topics are only worthy of shameful people, that is, “those who are disobedient,” on whom “the wrath of God comes” (5:6). The mere talk of the committing of these deeds is both proscribed as a standard and reckoned as shameful coparticipation with evildoers (5:7, 11). Instead, the readers are to “expose” the “unfruitful works of darkness.”

It is important to see here that the sanction of refraining from talk about such behavior comes not from a threat of punishment⁷² but from an association with shame. The writer is helping to orient converts to their new associations with God and his people.⁷³ People in honor and shame communities work to avoid shame associations. Those who previously have been described as honored “sharers [συμμέτοχα] in the promise in Christ Jesus” (3:6) are here told not to be “associated [συμμέτοχοι] with” wrath-inducing behaviors of the unconverted (5:5–7). Even talking about this behavior is a form of association. The writer urges distance between his readers and the shameful deeds of darkness, darkness in which they had participated in their former, preconverted lives (5:8). By contrast, his readers, he says, are “light in the Lord” (5:8). They should reflect this light in what they say and do, aiming to please the honored Lord to whom they belong (5:9–10).

To those not conversant in honor and shame dynamics, the exhortations both of 5:4 and of 5:12 seem to stand in tension with the comments about exposing deeds of darkness in 5:11. Some commentators rule out verbal activity to be implied by the term “expose,” since talking about evil deeds is said to be shameful. Talk of this sort has been condemned in 5:4 and is condemned again in 5:12.⁷⁴ Yet, public, often verbal, exposure is a major facet of assigning shame.⁷⁵ It normally refers to an open reprimand of an individual’s shortcomings. In Eph 5:11–14 exposure refers to the public revelation of the despicableness of a deed, a public that here is likely restricted to the church community itself. Fruitless deeds of darkness must be exposed. They are utterly shameful. According to the writer of Ephesians, it is shameful even to talk about them.

72. With Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 325; contra Best, *Ephesians*, 483.

73. On the centrality and normality of this activity for early Christianity, see Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 34 and 36.

74. Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 570–72; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 329–30; Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 226–27, 230.

75. Ausubel, “Relationships between Shame and Guilt in the Socializing Process,” 568–69; Daube, “Shame Culture in Luke,” 365; Gershen Kaufman, “The Meaning of Shame: Toward a Self-Affirming Identity,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 21 (1974): 568–74; Newbold, “Personality Structure and Response to Adversity in Early Christian Hagiography,” 205; Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” 42. For an exegetical defense of verbal confrontation belonging to the term ἐλέγχειν that appears in Eph 5:12, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Ephesians 5,12–13: ἐλέγχειν and Conversion in the New Testament,” *ZNW* 80 (1989): 93–100.

That proscription goes counter to standard practices in the kinds of honor and shame environments that Ephesians appears to address. Gossip about suspect deeds performed in private, one way of talking about the deeds of another, can be a significant, socially acceptable means of attacking the reputation of another.⁷⁶ The writer clearly distinguishes between public exposure, projecting God's "light" on such misdeeds, and conversational activities (which conceivably include gossip but are not restricted to gossip) about behaviors that God also disdains as "darkness." In some honor-shame societies, people are known to hide certain deeds for fear of incurring shame.⁷⁷ The writer of Ephesians certainly reflects this in the ways he addresses what "people do secretly" (5:12). The great shame associated even with talking about those deeds seems to motivate the writer's further explanation of the need to expose them (5:13–14). Proper exposure belongs to the honorable realm of light "in the Lord" (5:8). Damaging another's reputation by talking about his or her deeds would be just as much a part of the darkness as performing the deeds themselves.

Ephesians 5:15–20

The brief section 5:15–20 follows the same line of thought as what has preceded, contrasting unconverted dishonor with the honorable behavior demanded by the state of being a convert. Here, the language appeals to wisdom and folly. Folly is shameful; wisdom is honorable. "So, do not be foolish" (5:17) emerges as a shaming challenge. No one wants the label of fool. The preferred reputation comes to those who "understand what the will of the Lord is" (5:17), the way of wisdom. Here again, the writer is dealing with his readers' own reputation before the honored God. By extension this reputation also includes the members of their faith communities, who are to reflect this honor. By implication, those who are not attached to the honored God might think differently about what comprises folly. To accent the difference, the writer pairs shameful drunkenness and its resulting debauchery with honored Spirit-filling (5:18), which produces words of praise, words that celebrate the honor of the God with whom they are associated.

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

The notorious "household" section of Ephesians maintains the same regard for honor and shame issues.⁷⁸ This is not readily discernible if the section is excised from its context. Though superficially it does have con-

76. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, 83, 90.

77. *Ibid.*, 81; Daube, "Shame Culture in Luke," 363.

78. The literature on this section is extensive. The point here is not to weigh in on the discussion of that material but to show how the section continues the concern for honor and shame that has appeared in every other section of the letter.

nections with the wisdom motif immediately preceding,⁷⁹ it pursues its own line of thought in detailing the responsibilities of three commonly portrayed household relationships: wives-husbands, children-fathers, and slaves-masters. The fact that Ephesians reverses the order of the parties being addressed from what generally appears in non-Christian household instruction is noteworthy: wives before husbands; children before fathers; slaves before masters.⁸⁰ Ephesians all along has been asserting a reordered understanding of honor. The order in which each member of the pair is addressed reinforces the sense of a new honor conveyed throughout the letter.

Honor coming from God and being maintained before God remains principally in view. This becomes clearer when one begins to recognize ties to honor and shame issues established previously in the paraenesis. When wives are told to “be subject” to their husbands, the warrant for it is found in their relationship to exalted Christ: “as to the Lord” (5:22). The comparison of the husband as head of the wife with Christ as head of the church (5:23) evokes the imagery most recently stated in 4:15, where Christ as head becomes the target of growth for the entire church on the one hand and the nurturing source of growth for the entire body on the other.⁸¹ Wives are not being demeaned or shamed by this language. Rather, they are elevated to consider their behavior in association with Christ.

In the same manner, husbands are instructed not to conform to patterns of governance found in their world at large but, quite distinctively, to reflect the same honorable love that Christ demonstrated to the church in dying for it. In language that evokes the prior reference to Christ’s giving himself for the benefit of others (compare 5:2 with 5:25), the writer shows how Christ’s actions elevate the status of the object of his affection, the church, which is to become great “in splendor” (5:27). Husbands should do the same for their wives, implying a subjugation of their own honor-seeking for the promotion of their wives’ well-being.⁸²

79. As is often observed, the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι in 5:21 modifies the verb πληροῦσθε in v. 18, while the phrase ἐν φόβου Χριστοῦ in 5:21 does evoke a wisdom motif. However, from this point on the wisdom vocabulary disappears. Therefore (pace Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 716), the section here is being treated as a distinct line of thought.

80. Note that tendency in a span from Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253.5 to Seneca, *Ep.* 94.1–2. See Perkins, *Ephesians*, 127. Ephesians is not unique in the NT in doing this. See Col 3:18–4:1 and 1 Pet 3:1–7. However traditional the ordering may be for churches, Ephesians uses the tradition to reinforce its honor message.

81. The literature on this passage is quite extensive. With regard to this verse, there is a large amount of material addressing whether “head” refers to ruling authority (as it appears to do so in 1:22) or “source,” or both. By focusing on 4:15, the point here is to recognize the most recent reference to that concept in the body of the letter, not to take a stand on the issue. See the discussion in Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 369.

82. In this regard, note the discussion in Best, *Ephesians*, 539–41; E. S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 269–70; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 373–74. All three recognize that, however conventional Ephesians may appear in its nonegalitarian outlook, it is being distinct in what husbands are instructed to do.

When children are instructed to obey their parents, the supporting warrant is found in the statement “this is right” (6:1). But what supports the rightness?—a quotation from the Decalogue, where children are told to “honor” their mother and father (6:2). The honorable standing belonging to them “in the Lord” (6:1) should lead them to show public honor to their parents. Likewise, fathers are told not to behave in a way that causes their children to enter into behavior that the writing previously has portrayed as shameful: anger (compare 6:4 with 4:26, 31). Instead, their instruction should reflect their association with the honored God, bringing “them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4).

Though lengthier than the instructions to either wives or children, the instructions to slaves follow a similar format. They are urged to be slaves of the exalted Christ (6:5, 6, and 7), not merely of human masters. Honor before the exalted Lord is what counts for all people, whether slave or free (6:8). So also masters, regardless of their earthly status, are reminded that they are slaves of the exalted, heavenly Master (6:9) and are told to treat their own slaves with the awareness that honor before God is what principally matters.

Rather than impose onto these texts anachronistic patterns of response to the world,⁸³ one should observe these sets of instruction primarily within the cultural framework of honor and shame. Ephesians is not interested in stabilizing its readership with values from the world at large.⁸⁴ Rather, it is interested in leading its converted readership to consider how its ways of living should reflect the honor received by virtue of its association with the honored God. This part of the letter certainly exhibits resemblances to forms of behavior championed by the wider Greco-Roman culture at large. There are also distinctives. Both resemblances and distinctives reside precisely in the arena of the honor that Ephesians has been celebrating all along. Association with the honored God, or Christ, must naturally give way to behavior that upholds that honor. In Ephesians this appears to be true always, even in household relations.

83. I refer here to the work of M. Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Though I find her work illuminating in many ways, I take issue with her approach on two fronts. One, the models developed by Bryan Wilson have dubious application to anything going on in the first century, hence my term “anachronistic.” Wilson’s models were developed from observations of contemporaneous religious activity that grew out of a Christian awareness. It is a suspect methodology to apply these models to the development of the very literature that helped foster the contemporaneous practices in the first place. See B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 108–10. Wilson himself has recognized the need to move beyond his typology. See B. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 111–13, in the process endorsing the work of his student Roy Wallis (*Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984]). However Wallis (pp. 5–6) disclaims any usefulness of his typology for historical retrojection. The data for it are not obtainable. My second objection to MacDonald’s work lies in her circular reasoning. She assumes a later date of Ephesians, and based on the assumptions, projects a social scenario that is supposed to move from the ideals of Paul to the corruption of those ideals in the Pastorals.

84. Contra MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, 115–20.

Ephesians 6:10–20

The final segment of the letter begins with an honor challenge: “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power” (6:10).⁸⁵ As is typical throughout the letter, however, the writer shows his greatest concern, not for public reputation, but for reputation in an arena of a different sort, “not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12). The “armor” that the readers are enjoined to put on does reflect behaviors that have visible elements: truth (1:13; 4:15, 21, 24, 25; 5:9), righteousness (4:24), and peace (2:14, 15, 17; 4:3). These are also qualities, along with faith (6:16), that have received attention elsewhere in the letter⁸⁶ and so have automatic association with the honored life in Christ. Yet the point of the “armor” is for the battle that is not seen. What others may see is not the main issue. The main issue is being fortified with actions that befit one who belongs to the exalted Lord.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, what emerges from the focus on honor and shame is Ephesians’ emphasis on introducing its readership of converts to a new way of living. Some aspects resemble the culture of outsiders to the faith. But the morals themselves are entirely rooted in the readers’ association with God and with the lordly, exalted Christ. The writer demonstrates that his readers as converts have received special, honored status, by virtue of Christ’s activity, at the instigation of the eminent God. Based on this status, they are to uphold their new high reputation by the way they conduct their lives.

Overall, the argument proceeds from a consideration of God’s honor, to Christ’s, to the readers’, to the writer’s. Against this background, the readers are urged to sustain their honor by living “worthily.” The writing does fall neatly into two halves, but it is misleading to refer to one as doctrinal/theological and the other as practical. Rather, the letter is a unit, with its principal interest being the honor enjoyed by those connected to God through Jesus. We see both a celebration of honored status and a corroboration of that honor. This is not an alternate form of an indicative/imperative scheme. The writer is not elaborating on an indicative “you are honored” with the imperative “therefore live honorably.” Rather he exults, “you are honored,” and then instructs his readers to live worthily of that honor. The readers’ relationship to God and to other “saints” leads to a set of concerns, which in turn leads to a challenge to the readers to rise to the occasion; this response flows out of a recognition of their special status from God.

85. Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images of Family in Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 141. See, also, deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 10. For a Homeric example of a military honor-shame taunt, see *Il.* 3.38–58.

86. Note the discussion in Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 439–40.

Ephesians addresses a variety of topics. Why all those topics must appear together is not readily discernible from the writing itself. Yet, regardless of the topic it addresses at any point, Ephesians maintains a strong, consistent emphasis on honor and shame. Students of Ephesians would do well to let this emphasis set the agenda for their investigations into this letter.