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**A Review of
John Paul Heil's
*Ephesians:
Empowerment to
Walk in Love for the
Unity of All in Christ.*
Atlanta: SBL/Leiden: Brill,
2007**

By

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In just under 320 pages, Heil seeks to demonstrate that Paul, as the “implied author” of the letter addressed to the Ephesians, employs a sustained and rather “intricate and intriguing” (318) chiasmic literary/rhetorical structure and strategy to communicate a fundamental message to the believers in various house churches in Ephesus and, by extension, to other believers scattered throughout the larger Cayster Valley as well.¹ That is, Paul, as “implied author” (for Heil, in fact the actual author [4–5]), most likely sent Tychicus with an encyclical letter to be read or be performed on his behalf, and, according to Heil (as per the title of his book), the letter was meant

to provide “empowerment to walk in love for the unity of all in Christ.”

In his conclusion, he states that: listening to the intricate and intriguing chiasmic patterns of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians

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empowers its audience to “walk,” that is, behave and conduct themselves, “in love,” that is, within the dynamic realm of being not only loved by God and Christ but loving God, Christ, and one another, in order to bring about the cosmic unity of all things in the heavens and the earth—including believing Jews and Gentiles as well as all evil powers—within the dynamic realm of being “in Christ.” In short, Ephesians functions as the empowerment to walk in love for the unity of all in Christ. (318).

In this regard, he finds the work of scholars such as Botha, Dewey, Harvey, Kelber, Longenecker, Shiner, Wendland, and others (surprisingly, no mention is ever made of Rhoads) particularly useful in that they all stress the importance of paying particular attention to the literary design and rhetorical structure of an ancient letter such as would assist not only the performer in memorizing and then persuasively communicating its message but also in facilitating its comprehension and retention by those listeners to whom it was addressed or for whom it was performed.

Given the general oral-aural context of the Greco-Roman world within which the letter to the Ephesians was initially crafted and communicated, prepared, and performed, Heil argues, I think correctly, that a lector (most likely Tychicus) was appointed to read aloud the letter to the gathered communities in Ephesus and its environs. Further, he insists that, as an *aide de mémoire*, the apostle employed chiasm as the major literary/rhetorical strategy—a literary/rhetorical device that for Heil operates at both the macro- and microlevels of the letter. In particular, he suggests that the letter as a whole comprises fifteen micro-chiastic structures constituting a macro-chiasm and that each of these fifteen literary units reflects its own in-built micro-chiastic arrangement as well.

From the outset, perhaps it should be pointed out that Heil is not entirely clear about how his “classification system” or taxonomy is to be understood. Are we dealing with a two tier or a three-tier chiasmic structure when it comes to analyzing the book as a whole? That is, are we to understand, for example, that *each* of the fifteen literary units constitutes a “micro-chiasmic unit” in itself (see 13—section heading A) or a “macro-chiasmic unit” as a whole with the pericope, 4:1–16, serving as a kind of literary fulcrum or occupying an unparalleled pivotal position “at the center of the [macro-] chiasm” (see 42–43 and 45—in particular, section heading F, point 2 of the summary)? Or are we to reserve the language of “micro-chiasmic structure” to those smaller units into which the fifteen units are themselves further subdivided (see 45—section heading F, point 1) and that of “macro-structure” for the epistle as a whole— independent of its presumed fifteen literary units (see 39 for such an understanding)? Be that as it may (and however Heil’s use of language is to be understood), he insists that the letter that we now have as being addressed to the Ephesians is chiasmic in structure through and through.

For him, there are clearly discernible objective chiasmic features in Ephesians itself that obviate the need subjectively to impale the letter on some sort of literary procrustean bed or to place it on a rather arbitrary literary template in our analysis of it. In his words: “One of the main features of this investigation is that all the proposed chiasms are based on precise verbal parallels found objectively in the text, rather than on thematic or conceptual parallels, which can often be subjective” (14).

Further, he argues that love as both term and theme gives some lexical cohesion and overall semantic coherence to the letter as a

whole. He lays out the basic chiasmic structure in which, for him, the term and theme of love are foregrounded as follows:

1. *A 1:1–2: Grace and peace as gifts from God and Christ*
2. *B 1:3–14: “that we might be holy and blameless before him in love” (1:4) and “he graced us in the Beloved” (1:6)*
3. *C 1:15–23: “your love for all the holy ones” (1:15)*
4. *D 2:1–10: “because of his great love ... with which he loved ... us” (2:4)*
5. *E 2:11–22: Christ’s gift of peace (2:14, 15, 17) is a gift of love*
6. *F 3:1–13: the references to God’s “grace” and “giving” (3:2, 7, 8) refer to God’s love*
7. *G 3:14–21: “in love ... rooted and grounded” (3:17) and “to know the love . . . of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (3:19)*
8. *H 4:1–16: “forbearing one another in love” (4:2); “being fruitful in love” (4:15); “the building up of itself in love” (4:16)*

9. G' 4:17–32: *The references to “give grace” (4:29) and “being gracious . . . as also God in Christ was gracious to us” (4:32) refer to God’s love*

10. F' 5: 1–6: *“beloved . . . children” (5:1) and “walk in love . . . just as also Christ loved . . . us” (5:2)*

11. E' 5:7–14: *that you are “light” (5:8) is a gift of God’s love and the reference to “approving what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:10) is part of the love theme*

12. D' 5:15–6:9: *“love . . . your wives as also the Christ loved . . . the church” (5:25); “so ought also husbands to love . . . their own wives . . . he who loves . . . his own wife loves . . . himself” (5:28); “each one of you should thus love . . . his own wife as himself” (5:33)*

13. C' 6: 10–13: *the references to “be empowered” (6:10) and “have the power” (6:11, 13) are gifts of God’s love*

14. B' 6:14–22: *“Tychicus the beloved . . . brother” (6:21)*

15. A' 6:23–24: *“Peace to the brothers and love” (6:23) and “grace be with all who love . . . the Lord Jesus Christ in immortality” (6:24)*

Undoubtedly, *love* is an important term and theme in the letter as a whole, and so Heil must be granted some (even much) credit for drawing this to our attention and for underscoring the important role that it is clearly playing in the letter as a whole—as others, such as Hoehner in his recent commentary (2002), have done. But so are terms and themes such as *grace* (1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:1, 2, 7, 8, 14;

4:7; 6:24—thirteen times) and *peace* (1:2; 2:14, 15, 17[2x]; 4:3; 6:15 23—eight times). In fact, a statistical analysis of the

In fact, a statistical analysis of the Pauline corpus reveals that of the forty-four occurrences, *peace* appears more often only in Romans than it does in Ephesians: ten times in the former as opposed to eight times in the latter. This then provides some justification, perhaps, for the claim and contention of others such as Smalley, Wengst, and the current reviewer that the epistle cannot be entirely understood unless and until it is made to at least interface and interact explicitly, even at a veiled polemical level, with the politics of the Greco-Roman world at large, with the imperial terms and themes of both grace and peace (*pax Romana*) with which Emperor Augustus was clearly associated and imperial terms and themes that stood in stark contrast and were subordinate to the eminently superior peace of Christ (*pax Christi*).

In addition, and as much as Heil tries to avoid subjectivity in his chiasmic analysis of the letter as a whole, one cannot avoid the general impression that he has not entirely succeeded. For instance, he readily admits that of the fifteen chiasmic literary units into which he has divided the epistle, the word *love* appears in only nine of them (45), that is, 60 percent of the time. Over and over again he is forced to concede, with minor stylistic variation, that: “although no explicit terms for ‘love’ appear in this [chiasmic] unit” (see 17, 23, 25, 29, 31, 32, 35 and 36 [2x]), he still finds it necessary to contend that terms such as “obey” (6:1), “honor” (6:2), “do not anger” (6:4), “be empowered,” and so forth are conceptually compatible with it (love) and therefore should be brought within its ambit as well—precisely what he said he would eschew at a more methodological level. That is, Heil, in insisting that the epistle can best be subdivided into fifteen distinct and discrete chiasmic literary

units so as to facilitate its performance and appropriation and with love (and none other) as its dominant term and theme throughout, seems to have placed the letter on a literary and rhetorical procrustean bed after all.

It seems to the reviewer that other rhetorical moves and strategies such as *inclusio* (see 1:2 and 6:23, 24 at the macro-level, for example) and lexical recursion also feature in the epistle as listening devices, as “hearing aids,” and as *aides de mémoire* as well, and so it might not be entirely compelling to insist that the entire letter can best be analyzed by subjecting it exclusively to Heil’s fifteen “intricate and intriguing” chiasmic structures.

In the end, therefore, the current reviewer remains less than entirely persuaded—as much as he appreciates the various useful insights that the author has shared with us along the way.