

PAUL'S RHETORICAL PURPOSE IN EPHESIANS 4:9–10: UPSILON VECTOR¹ MIMESIS

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*"Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. Do you plan a tower
that will pierce the clouds? First lay the foundation on humility."*

—St. Augustine

Introduction

Ephesians 4:9–10 reads:

9 What does "he ascended" mean except that he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? 10 The One who descended—He himself is also the One who ascended, far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.²

Interpreters differ sharply in answering the two most important questions about Ephesians 4:9–10: (1) To what does the "descent" in 4:9 refer? (2) What is Paul's rhetorical purpose in employing 4:9–10 in the context of the unit 4:1–16? An ancillary question is that of the function of 4:1–16 within the context of the letter as whole.

In an earlier article, I attempted to answer the first question, that of the "descent" in Ephesians 4:9. There I argued that, given the Old Testament (LXX) background, Greco-Roman background, concurring New Testament usage and background, and the later Patristic tradition, it is highly likely that the descent phrase in Greek, *katebē eis ta katōtera tēs gēs* ("he descended to the lower regions of the earth") refers to the belief, shared by both Paul and his audience, that between the time of his death and resurrection Jesus made an actual descent journey to the realm of the dead, Sheol (Hades), the "underworld."³

¹ The metaphor "Upsilon Vector" is taken from the way that the Greek letter *upsilon*, "υ" is written: first with a descending downstroke then with an ascending upstroke.

² My translation, slightly modified from the NAB. All translations are from the NAB unless otherwise noted.

³ See William Bales, "The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 84–100, a revision of a part of *The Meaning and Function of Ephesians 4:9–10*

In that earlier article I also argued that the *meaning* of lexically similar “descent” phrases used in the LXX fell into three general categories. The most common meaning was figurative, signifying actual dying or death. The second most common meaning was to indicate a descent to or existence in the underworld proper, the abode of the dead. Third, descent phrases were sometimes employed metaphorically as terms for enduring some sort of affliction.⁴

While on the literal level the descent phrase in Ephesians 4:9 points to the actual descent Christ made to Hades, this literal descent journey is not developed by Paul in the ensuing verses and is not germane to the rhetorical point he is making in 4:9–10. Rather, he most likely employs the descent phraseology *figuratively* (see previous paragraph) to indicate *Christ’s passion and death*.

To assert what meaning is “most likely” is not to argue the case. The next section in this article will demonstrate the theological prominence and importance of *the death of Christ* in Ephesians. After having shown such prominence—and, given LXX usage and background—it becomes probable that the descent language Paul employs in Ephesians 4:9–10 taps into this rich, theologically conspicuous vein that is *the passion and death of Christ*, found throughout the letter.

The Death of Christ in Ephesians

An analysis of those places in Ephesians where *the death of Christ* is prominent readily discloses its importance in the letter.

Ephesians 1:7

Ephesians 1:7 reads: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions.”⁵ Paul here asserts that, through his (Christ’s) blood, Christians have “redemption.” The blood of Christ here in Ephesians 1:7 is clearly a metonym for his Passion and death—the event at which his blood was shed.⁶ Commenting on the phrase “through his blood” in Ephesians 1:7, Rudolph Schnackenburg remarks:

in Both Its Immediate and Its More General Context (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2002).

⁴ See Bales, “Descent of Christ,” 96.

⁵ The NAB’s “by” is replaced here with “through.”

⁶ Almost all commentators concur with this statement. Many other New Testament texts use “the blood of Christ” or “the blood of Jesus” to refer to his Passion and death. For detailed treatments on these sorts of phrases, see J. Behm, “*αἷμα* [blood],” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereafter, TDNT), ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley, vol.1, *Alpha–Gamma* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 174; and F. Laubach, “*αἷμα*,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 1:222–24.

The “blood” of Christ (cf. 2.13) has become, like his “cross” (2.16) a graphic abbreviation, a symbol pregnant with the truth of the redemption which took place in history but which remains effective and final. . . . The mention of Christ’s blood in this sense is to be found widely throughout early Christian documents and may be counted as a *topos* [motif] in the early Christian catechesis, particularly for the atoning, expiating, sanctifying death of Jesus on the Cross.⁷

Joseph Robinson comments on how the mention of Christ’s blood, associated as it is in Ephesians 1:7 with the idea of forgiveness of sins, carries sacrificial overtones:

To the Jewish mind “blood” was not merely—nor even chiefly—the life-current flowing in the veins of the living; it was especially the life poured out in death; and yet more particularly in its religious aspect it was the symbol of sacrificial death. The Passover lamb, whose blood was sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts, was the most striking feature of the Redemption from Egypt. The sacrificial blood of the Mosaic ritual was the condition of the remission of sins: “without blood-shedding no forgiveness takes place.”⁸

And so the word “redemption” in Ephesians 1:7 is likely being used figuratively of liberation or deliverance from sin (see Col 1:14; Heb 9:15).⁹ That the word “redemption” is used in this way in Ephesians 1:7 finds further support by noting that “the forgiveness of transgressions” stands in apposition to—and is therefore explanatory of—“redemption through his blood.”¹⁰

⁷ Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. H. Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 56.

⁸ Joseph A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1904), 29.

⁹ See 2a under “ἀπολύτρωσις [redemption]” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (hereafter, BDAG), W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁰ So most commentators and translations (NAB and RSV). See, for example: Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Anchor Bible Commentary 34 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 83; Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 28; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 106; J. P. Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ*, Studies in Biblical Literature 11 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 65; H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 207; F. Thielman,

New Testament usage of “redemption” has its roots in Old Testament literature, particularly in the description of the redemption event *par excellence*, Israel’s deliverance and liberation from Pharaoh and Egypt in the exodus.¹¹ The blood of Christ (that is, his sacrificial death), is, like the blood of the Passover lamb for Israel in the OT, the means of humanity’s redemption.

As Ephesians proceeds, it will become clear that the audience has been redeemed from the effects of their *transgressions*. Sin produces spiritual death and alienation from the life of God (2:1, 12; 4:18). Sin places one under the wrath of God (2:3; 5:6). The death of Christ has delivered the Ephesian Christians from these dire circumstances.

Extravagant language is used throughout the “Blessing” (Eph 1:3–14).¹² Nowhere is that extravagance more evident than in 1:7–8a. The mention of redemption through Christ’s death, of the forgiveness of transgressions, and of the great goodness and bounty of the Father as being the source of these benefits causes 1:7–8a to figure prominently in the catalogue of blessings listed in *The Blessing*.

Ephesians 2:13, 14, 16

Ephesians 2:13 reads: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.” As in Ephesians 1:7, the blood of Christ in 2:13 signifies his death.

The language of “coming near” stands in contrast to Ephesians 2:12, which spoke of a time when the Gentile portion of his audience was without Christ, alienated from the community of God’s people, and cut off from God. The blood of Christ—that is, his death—has reversed these negative conditions.

Ephesians 2:14 also speaks of the death of Christ: “For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity through his flesh.” The phrase “through his flesh” signifies Jesus’s sacrificial death.¹³

Ephesians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 60.

¹¹ The verb *lytroō* (λυτρόω; “redeem”) is used often in the LXX to refer to the “redeeming” acts of God at the exodus (see Exod 6:6; 15:3; Deut 7:8; 9:26; 13:6; 21:8; 24:18; Pss 74:2; 77:15; 1 Chron 17:21).

¹² Eph 1:3–14 is one long, prolix sentence, in which the opening word of the sentence (“Blessed”) effectively marks the entire sentence as an extended “Blessing” of God by Paul.

¹³ This is the only place in Ephesians where Christ’s “flesh” is mentioned. On the basis of similar wording in Col 1:22 and also verses such as Gal 3:13 and Rom 7:4 (which associate the death of Christ with abrogating the negative aspects of the law), most interpreters understand the phrase “through his flesh” as a metaphor for Christ’s death. So, for example: Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 264 and 298–99; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 115; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 142; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 259; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 196; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 374; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 168.

Through his flesh—that is, through his death—the dividing wall of enmity has been broken down between Jew and Gentile. Regardless of how one interprets the Greek phrase “the dividing wall,”¹⁴ this verse clearly indicates that Christ’s death has brought *unity* (“he who made both one”) and *peace* (“he is our peace”) to these two formerly alienated groups.

In Ephesians 2:16 the death of Christ is mentioned yet again: “. . . and [that He] might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it.” Here “the cross” refers to Christ’s death, a death that has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God and to one another.

Ephesians 5:2

Ephesians 5:2 reads: “. . . and live in love, even as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.”¹⁵ The phrase “[he] gave himself up for us” is a clear reference to Christ’s death. The Greek verb meaning to “give up” in the sense of “offer up” (*paradidōmi*) is used in Romans 4:25 and 8:32, and in Galatians 2:20 in connection with Christ’s death. Galatians 2:20 contains a close parallel to the phraseology found in Ephesians 5:2. There Paul states that Christ “loved me and gave himself up for me” (using a form of *paradidōmi* for “gave himself up”). Contextually, the statement in Galatians 2:20 refers to Christ’s death.¹⁶

The phrase “gave himself up” in Ephesians 5:2 indicates that it was Christ who took the initiative in the act of handing himself over to death. This “giving up” is spoken of in sacrificial terms, using a hendiadys,¹⁷ *prosphoran kai thusian* (*offering and sacrifice* = “sacrificial offering”). The words *prosphoran* and *thusian* are used often in the OT to refer to many types of sacrifices, both cereal and animal.¹⁸

The final phrase “fragrant aroma” is also indicative of sacrifice. The Greek phrase used here for “fragrant aroma” (*eis osmēn euōdias*; εἰς ὀσμὴν

¹⁴ Suggestions for identifying the “dividing wall” (Greek τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ [*to mesotoichon tou phragmou*]) include: (1) the OT law; (2) the barrier wall in the Jerusalem temple separating the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts and sanctuary; or (3) perhaps both the law and the barrier wall could be intended as a *double entendre*. For further discussion on this question, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 296–98; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 141–42; Best, *Ephesians*, 253–57; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 368–71; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 164–67.

¹⁵ Slightly modified NAB.

¹⁶ Gal 2:20 continues the sentence that had begun at the end of 2:19: “I have been crucified with Christ; 20 yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”

¹⁷ An arrangement where two juxtaposed nouns indicate a single referent.

¹⁸ See W. Schenk, “προσφορά,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. H. Balz and G. Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:178; H. Thyen, “θυσιά,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2161–63.

εὐωδίας), regularly translates the OT Hebrew רוֹיַח נִיחֹאֵךְ (*reakh nikhoakh*, a “soothing aroma”). The phrase *eis osmēn euōdias* is used in the LXX (particularly in Leviticus and Numbers) to refer to all of the main kinds of sacrifices.¹⁹ The phrase indicates that a sacrifice is both acceptable and pleasing to God. Paul uses this same phraseology in Philippians 4:18. There he speaks of the Philippians’ gift to him as a “fragrant aroma” (*osmēn euodias*). His point is that their act of giving for the benefit of another (in this case Paul) greatly pleased God.

Ephesians 5:2 employs the death of Christ for the rhetorical purpose of *mimēsis*, as an *example* of how one is to live a life of love. In an act pleasing to God, Christ handed himself over to death as a sacrificial offering for the benefit of the Church. In analogous ways, Christians are to give of themselves for the benefit of others.

Ephesians 5:25

Ephesians 5:25 reads: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it.”²⁰

Ephesians 5:25 and Ephesians 5:2 are parallel in structure:

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives
even as Christ
loved the Church
and gave himself up for it

Ephesians 5:2

and walk in love
even as Christ
loved us
and gave himself up for us

As in 5:2, the phrase “gave himself up” in 5:25 signifies Christ’s death given for the benefit of the Church. The benefits of Christ’s death that accrue to the Church are elaborated in 5:26–27. Christ’s death resulted in the Church becoming sanctified and cleansed (5:26) and has enabled it to stand before Christ in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or blemish (5:27). The language in 5:26–27 indicates that through Christ’s death Christians have undergone a transformation, making them acceptable in the divine presence.²¹

The context of 5:25 is that of an exhortation made to husbands that they should love their wives. As was the case in 5:2, Christ’s sacrificial death for the sake of his church is held up for the purpose of *mimēsis*, the grand *model* of love to which Christians (in this case husbands) are to aspire.

¹⁹ See, for example, Lev 1:9 (the burnt offering), Lev 2:2 (the cereal offering), Lev 3:5 (the peace offering), and Lev 4:31 (the sin offering).

²⁰ Slightly modified NAB.

²¹ See Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 249–51; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 375–77; Best, *Ephesians*, 542.

Conclusions on the Death of Christ in Ephesians

The death of Christ appears at important places in Ephesians and is of great significance in the letter. Christ's death, having brought about redemption from transgression, figures prominently in the opening *Blessing* (Eph 1:7). Christ's death is the supreme demonstration of his love for humanity, so much so that it serves as *the model* that Christians are to follow (5:2, 25). Christ's death has reconciled and unified Jews and Gentiles (2:13–15), while reconciling both to God (2:16). His death enables a transformation that permits acceptability in the divine presence (5:25–27). The death of Christ has brought about more than just unity. It has brought into existence the new creation that is the Church (2:13–18).

In Ephesians 1:7 and 2:13–16, Paul's purpose in mentioning Christ's death is consistent with his overall rhetorical purposes in Ephesians 1–3. Like other theological realities that he has introduced in the first half of his letter, the notices of Christ's death in Ephesians 1 and 2 are targeted to reaffirm and renew the audience's appreciation of both what God has done for them and of all that they have become a part of as Christians. The notices of Christ's death in 5:2 and 5:25, situated as they are in the exhortative section of the letter (chs. 4–6), function to prod the audience to imitate Christ's example. Thus, the unity created by Christ's offering of himself spoken of in Ephesians 2 will, according to chapter 5, be maintained by *mimēsis* of that same sacrificial mindset.²²

In this section of the article I have demonstrated how very conspicuous the death of Christ is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In an earlier section, I noted that the most common usage of similarly worded "descent" phrases in the LXX (the Greek OT) was figurative, signifying actual dying or death. Such phrases were sometimes employed metaphorically for enduring some sort of affliction and distress. Given the array of texts in Ephesians treating of Christ's death—and keeping in mind the most common LXX usage of similarly worded "descent" phrases—it is likely that in Ephesians 4:9–10 Paul's "descent" phraseology also refers to Christ's Passion and death.

Philippians 2:6–11: An Exegetical Clue for Interpreting Ephesians 4:9–10

A number of commentators have suggested a correspondence between Ephesians 4:9–10 and Philippians 2:6–11.²³ While not concurring with all

²² Lincoln, commenting on 5:2, states: "Certainly the sacrifice of one's own interests out of concern for the welfare of others is the quality above all that fosters harmony in the community" (*Ephesians*, 312).

²³ The suggestion is ancient; see St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily XI (at his comment on Eph 4:9–10). See also, among recent commentators: C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Authorship, Origin, and Purpose* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1951), 147; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 178; W. Liefeld, *Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL:

the positions in this article, these scholars interpret the “descent and ascent” of Christ in Ephesians 4:9–10 in a way similar to what is seen in Philippians 2:6–11, as an “abasement” and “glorification” of Christ. I think these scholars are on the right track. On this view, the privileges associated with Christ’s exaltation are a *reward* for his self-renunciation and vicarious suffering endured during his Passion and death. This “Way of the Redeemer”²⁴—this “*Upsilon Vector*”²⁵—exhibits the same basic Christology as that found elsewhere in the New Testament,²⁶ especially in the Gospels of John²⁷ and Luke.²⁸ It is to Philippians 2:6–11 that we now turn.

There are several important points of correspondence between Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10. *First*, both occur in passages where the primary concern is that of *ecclesial unity*. Just prior to both Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10, Paul makes an earnest plea that members of the Church strive for ecclesial unity. In Philippians 1:27–28a, his plea is concerned with *external* threats to unity (note *italicized* text):

Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear news of you, that you are standing firm in *one spirit*, with *one mind*, *struggling together* for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your *opponents*.

External threats could include things like heretical teaching (something Paul will address in Phil 3), ostracism from various societal groups such as families or guilds, and outright bodily harm.

As Philippians proceeds in 2:1–4,²⁹ Paul’s appeal for ecclesial unity moves to target *internal* threats. The appeal is grounded upon four conditions (protases) found in 2:1: “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace

InterVarsity Press, 1985), 102; P. Perkins, *Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 98; T. Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of The Old Testament in Ephesians*, Novum Testamentum Supplements 85 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 85.

²⁴ This term is used by Schnackenburg to describe Christ’s “descent-ascent” (*Ephesians*, 178).

²⁵ Again, the metaphor “*Upsilon Vector*” is taken from the way that the Greek letter *upsilon*, “υ” is written: first with a descending downstroke then with an ascending upstroke.

²⁶ See J. Schneider, “καταβαίνω [“descend”],” TDNT, 1:521; Joseph Fitzmyer, “Pauline Theology,” in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), 1395–96 (§59).

²⁷ See John 1:51; 3:13; 6:52; 20:17.

²⁸ See Luke 24:26: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and [then] enter into his glory?”

²⁹ Medieval editors unfortunately created a chapter break between the end of chapter 1 (1:30) and the beginning of chapter 2. The theme of unity pervades the passage that begins in Phil 1:27 and continues through 2:13.

in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy. . . .” These four conditions are followed immediately with an appeal (the apodosis) in 2:2: “[Then] complete my joy by being of the *same* mind, with the *same* love, *united* in heart, thinking *one* thing.”³⁰ In the protases Paul sets forth the situation as it then existed in the church at Philippi. *In Christ* there already was commendable unity between members—encouragement, fellowship, solace of love, compassion, and mercy. Paul’s concern in the apodosis is that the unity and concord that then existed continue to grow to maturation. The keys to the maintenance and further growth in unity and harmony are found in 2:3–4: humility, mutual consideration, and service to others.³¹

2:3 (A) Do nothing out of selfishness or out of pride,
(B) rather, in humility regard others as more
important than yourselves,

2:4 (A') each looking out not for his own interests,
(B') but also for the interests of others.

Both 2:3 and 2:4 consist of antithetic parallelisms. Negative admonitions in the A elements of each verse are contrasted with positive admonitions in the B elements. Further, the thought in the A element in 2:3, “do nothing out of selfishness or out of pride,” is developed and refined in the A' element in 2:4, “each looking out not for his own interests.” The thought in the B element in 2:3, “in humility regard others as more important than yourselves,” is likewise refined in the B' element of 2:4, “but [‘looking out’ understood from 2:4a] also for the interests of others.” Since 2:4b is parallel with 2:3b, Paul has connected the idea of regarding others as more important than oneself (2:3b) with the idea of looking out for the interests of others (2:4b). In other words, the “interior” disposition of 2:3b finds its “exterior” expression in 2:4b.³²

The enemies of ecclesial unity are pride and a self-centeredness that looks only to one’s own interests (2:3a and 2:4a). Conversely, that which promotes unity is humility that can regard others as more important than oneself, resulting in service to others (2:3b and 2:4b).³³

³⁰ Emphasis added.

³¹ For concurring opinions on the relationship of Phil 2:1–2 to 2:3–4, see Moises Silva, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 101; Gordon Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 86–87.

³² In antithetic parallelisms, the emphasis falls on the second element. In the case of both Phil 2:3 and 2:4, Paul emphasizes the “doing” more than the “not doing.”

³³ The principle of humbling oneself in order to consider and serve others for the sake of Church unity is seen elsewhere in Paul. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, where divisions in the believing community were a serious problem, Paul wrote: “No one should seek one’s own advantage, but that of his neighbor” (1 Cor 10:24). See also 1 Cor 13:4–5: “Love . . . does not seek its own interests.” In his letter to the Romans, in a context

A similar concern with the importance of ecclesial unity can be observed in Ephesians 4:1–6, just three verses prior to 4:9–10 (note italicized text):

¹ I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, ³ striving to preserve—in a peaceful bond—the unity that has been forged by the Spirit: ⁴ [there is] *one body* and *one Spirit*, as you were also called to the *one hope* of your call; ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*; ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*.³⁴

Nowhere else in all of Paul's writings is found the sort of rhetorical pressure on maintaining Church unity that is found in 4:4–6. In 4:7, Paul's concern *seems* to shift to that of diversity within the church, but that is not the full picture. Paul's concern in 4:7–16 (excluding vv. 9–10 for the moment), is to assert that the diversity of gifts given to the Church by Christ work ultimately to foster not only ecclesial growth, but unity as well (note italicized text):

⁷ But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore, it says: "He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men." . . . ¹¹ And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the holy ones, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of faith* and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Rather, living the truth in love, we should *grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ*, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, *joined and held together* by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love.

To reiterate, both Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10 occur in passages where the primary concern is that of ecclesial unity.

proximate to a prayer for unity (Rom 15:5–6), Paul expresses similar concerns: "We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves; let each of us please our neighbor for the good, for building up" (Rom 15:1–2).

³⁴ My translation, slightly modified from the NAB.

A second point of correspondence between Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10 is that the mention of Christ's humiliation and death is preceded by an exhortation to humility and mutual consideration. As we saw in the section just prior, Philippians 2:3–4 reads:

3 Do nothing out of selfishness or out of pride; rather, in
humility regard others as more important than yourselves,
4 each looking out not for his own interests, but also for the
interests of others.

And Ephesians 4:1–2 reads:

1 I . . . urge you to live . . . 2 with all humility and gentleness,
with patience, bearing with one another through love.

A third point of correspondence between Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10 is that the theme of descent and ascent (the "Upsilon Vector") is found in both passages. In Philippians 2:6–11, though not employing the Greek words for descend (*katabainō*) and ascend (*anabainō*), the thought is certainly present as the passage moves from Christ's pre-incarnate glory (in heaven; 2:6) to his humiliation and death (on earth: 2:7–8) and then to his exaltation on high (2:9–11).³⁵ In Ephesians 4:9–10, Christ's descent (*katabainō*) signifies the event of his death; his ascent (*anabainō*) signifies his exaltation on high.

There is a final point of correspondence between Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10. As the reader arrives at Philippians 2:5–8, it is clear that Paul employs Christ's humiliation and death (his *descent*) in 2:6–8 for the purpose of *mimēsis*, that is, as an example to imitate or follow.

Verse 5 is a Janus-like exhortation to *mimēsis*, bridging the two antithetic parallelisms in 2:3–4 with the opening part of the Christ hymn in 2:6–8: (2:5) "Have among yourselves the same mindset, that which is also in Christ Jesus."³⁶ The phrase "the same mindset" in 2:5 certainly references what has just preceded in 2:3–4, as the Greek verb *phroneite* ("think thus" or "have a mindset") in 2:5a recalls the same verb (*phroneō*) from 2:2, effectively sandwiching 2:3–4.

³⁵ Silva comments, "Whether or not the phrase ['he emptied himself'] focuses on the initial act of humiliation ('He became flesh,' John 1:14), it surely points forward to his death. In other words, the phrase is intended to encapsulate for the readers the whole descent of Christ from highest glory to lowest depths" (*Philippians*, 119–20; my emphasis). G. Hawthorne states: "Thus in these words [even death on a cross] the lowest point in the descent-theme that marks the first section of the hymn is reached—he who was in the form of God, was equal with God, emptied himself, humbled himself, surrendered himself to a criminal's death." (*Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary 43 [Dallas, TX: Word, 1983], 90; my emphasis).

³⁶ Slightly modified from the NAB, more accurately capturing the nuance of the Greek relative pronoun *ho* ("that which").

This “same mindset,” “that which is [or was] in Christ Jesus” thus refers to the humble, “seeing-to-the-interests-of-others” mentality specified in 2:3–4. That said, it is also clear that the relative pronoun “who” that begins 2:6, linking to “Christ Jesus” at the end of 2:5, signals an expansion of the theme of 2:5, making 2:6–8 effectively a visual presentation of the exhortation in 2:3–4:

6 Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. 7 Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, 8 he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Christ’s exaltation, his “reward,” detailed in 2:9–11, gives encouragement and incentive to Christians to make their own analogous *mimetic* “descent,” (2:6–8)—that is, to *imitate Christ and* give themselves humbly in service for the benefit of others.³⁷

Scholars are in general agreement that if a passage exists in one of Paul’s letters with several close similarities to a passage in another of his letters—a passage having interpretive ambiguities—then it is fitting to use that first passage as an interpretive clue for clarifying the ambiguities of the second. The several significant points of correspondence between Philippians 2:6–11 and Ephesians 4:9–10 suggest that the former provides just this sort of exegetical clue for interpreting the latter: like Philippians 2:6–11, Ephesians 4:9–10 gives encouragement and incentive to Christians to engage in *Upsilon Vector mimēsis* for the sake of their brethren, for the sake of ecclesial unity, and for the sake their own situation in the life beyond this life.

The Meaning of Ephesians 4:9–10: The Rhetoric of Upsilon Vector Mimēsis

Ephesians 4:9–10 and Midrash

Midrash was a common method of early Jewish exposition and rhetorical persuasion. Midrash (from the Hebrew דרש [*darash*], “to inquire”) was an interpretive technique whereby an author would set forth an OT text and then comment on or give some sort of an interpretation of that text. The comment or interpretation was employed either to persuade, chide, or in-

³⁷ And, just so as not to lose Paul’s overall train of thought, such “humble service for the benefit of others” is actually penultimate, as his primary concern is that of ecclesial unity, which began back in 1:27 and continues through 2:12 (at least).

struct.³⁸ Midrash was used at Qumran,³⁹ by Paul,⁴⁰ and by later rabbis.⁴¹ Paul stood, therefore, in an interpretive tradition that was probably well known to first-century Judaism and to Jewish Christianity.⁴²

Two midrashim flow from the Psalm 68 quote in Ephesians 4:8: “Therefore, it says: ‘He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men.’” Ephesians 4:9–10, the first midrash, picks up and comments on the “ascending on high” part of the Psalm 68 quote. Ephesians 4:11–16 is the second midrash, picking up and commenting on the words in the quote, “he gave gifts to men.” The words in the psalm-quote “. . . and took prisoners captive” is given no such “inquiry” (midrash), and therefore, I would suggest, was extraneous to Paul’s rhetorical concerns here in Ephesians 4:1–16.

Rhetorical Question

The Greek word *anebē* (“he ascended”) in the phrase *to de anebē ti estin* (“now regarding ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean?”; 4:9) indicates that it is specifically the idea of Christ’s *ascent*, mentioned in 4:8a, *anabas eis hypsos* (“He ascended on high”), that has moved Paul to expand his thought and comment via the technique of midrash in 4:9–10. The midrash begins in Ephesians 4:9, taking the form of a rhetorical question: “Now regarding ‘he ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth?”⁴³ A rhetorical question is asked in order to produce an effect upon the audience—generally, no answer is expected because an obvious answer is implied. Rhetorical questions are confrontational. They engage an audience in a kind of dialogue in which it is moved by the obviousness of the answer to the “question” to readily apprehend the “questioner’s” point. Rhetorical questions are thus an effective way to exhort an audience to practice a specific behavior and/or to adopt a particular mindset.

³⁸ See G. Porton, “Midrash,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (hereafter, ABD), ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:818–22; C. Cousar, *The Letters of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 49–50; A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 205–6; M. Silva, “Old Testament in Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 637–38.

³⁹ See D. Dimant, “Pesharim, Qumran,” ABD, 5:244–51. At Qumran, the interpretation of the OT text was introduced by the Hebrew word פֶּשֶׁר (from the Aramaic פִּשְׁרָא, meaning “interpretation”). The Qumran peshar interpretations are a type of midrash.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Rom 10:6–9.

⁴¹ See J. Neusner, *What is Midrash?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987); G. Porton, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash: Text and Commentary* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985).

⁴² Silva comments: “The numerous similarities between Paul and the later rabbis, when taken cumulatively, create the strong presumption that the apostle does reflect the Jewish culture of which he is a part (and which developed into what we call Rabbinic Judaism)” (“Old Testament In Paul,” 638).

⁴³ My translation.

Given the way that the rhetorical question in Ephesians 4:9 is phrased (the answer is given within the context of the question), it is clear that Paul expected his audience to see his point easily enough: Christ's ascent (4:8) implied that he had first made a descent "to the lower regions of the earth" (4:9). Based on my earlier conclusions about the meaning of the phrase "he descended into the lower regions of the earth" (*katebē eis ta katōtera tēs gēs*),⁴⁴ Paul's rhetorical question effectively asserts that Christ's ascent implied that he first had to die before his ascent. The reason Paul uses the words "he descended to the lower regions" to signify the death of Christ (besides the sacrificial, self-donating overtones such language indicates) is to make for a pleasing rhetorical balance: a *descent* contrasts with the *ascent* in the psalm-quote. To speak of Christ's death in the context of the letter to the Ephesians is to speak in terms of Christ willingly and humbly offering himself for others at the event of his Passion and death.⁴⁵ Paul is echoing here a theme we have seen already in this study in places like Philippians 2:6–11 and in Jesus's resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24: it was necessary for the Christ to suffer—to make his descent—before he entered into his glory.

The rhetorical thrust of 4:9 therefore becomes: "Now, the idea that Christ ascended, does it not also carry with it the idea that he first had to lay down his life as a sacrifice?" Paul expected his audience to respond, "Yes, of course we know that!" Paul does not wish his audience to stop there. Again, he has employed this rhetorical question to engage his audience in a kind of dialogue, to exhort and confront, to help his readers reconsider something known and obvious with the goal of *reframing* or perhaps *reaffirming their behavior and mindset*. Paul wants his audience to say to themselves: "Yes, we see that Christ's humiliation was the way to his exaltation, his Cross to his crown, his service to his reward, his descent to his ascent. Yes, Paul, and we see your further point: as it was with Christ, so must it be with us."

Paul's midrash into the Psalms quote has discovered an exhortation to *mimēsis*, to the end that his audience would behave toward one another in ways analogous to Christ's own "descent." As was the case in Philippians 2:6–11,⁴⁶ the death of Christ is the grand model, a model that summons the Christian to imitation.

But Paul has not quite finished his *midrash*.

⁴⁴ See Bales, "Descent of Christ," 96.

⁴⁵ See "Philippians 2:6–11: An Exegetical Clue for Interpreting Ephesians 4:9–10" above in this article.

⁴⁶ See "Philippians 2:6–11: An Exegetical Clue for Interpreting Ephesians 4:9–10" above in this article.

Quasi-Proverb in Ephesians 4:10

Ephesians 4:10 consists of three short phrases:⁴⁷

- (10a) The One who descended—He himself is also the
One who ascended
- (10b) far above all the heavens
- (10c) that he might fill all things.

Paul's statement in 4:10a about "the One who descended" connects with the descent language from 4:9; verse 10 will thus press home the exhortative point that he just made in 4:9.

The noun form *ho katabas* ("the One who descended") in 4:10a, is, within the Greek syntax of verse 10a, a pendant nominative. It is employed here by Paul—as is the case with most pendant nominatives—for emphasis.⁴⁸ Verse 10a thus *emphatically* asserts that "the One who descended" (*ho katabas*) is, *he himself*, "the One who ascended" (*ho anabas*).⁴⁹ But why make what, on the surface, seems like such an obvious and unnecessary point?

In response, 4:10a seems unnecessary only if one is unaware of the rhetoric of *Upsilon Vector mimēsis* just utilized by Paul in 4:9. If the exhortation to *mimēsis* in 4:9 is perceived, then there is no surprise when the same sort of rhetoric is immediately repeated in 4:10. If perceived in 4:9, then 4:9–10 becomes rhetorically coherent and could be paraphrased as follows: (v. 9) Now that "ascent" that I just spoke of in the psalm-quote (in 4:8), does it not imply that Christ first had to *descend* via his passion and sacrificial death? (v. 10) Indeed it does: the One who *descended*—the one who *suffered for us*—He himself is also the One who *ascended*, being *raised to heights of glory* spoken of in the psalm-quote.

That 4:10a is intended to reinforce the rhetoric of *mimēsis* becomes all the more likely in that its form appears to be quasi-proverbial. Later in Ephesians (5:28b), a proverb occurs that is formally similar to 4:10a:

Ephesians 5:28b *ho agapōn tēn eautou gunaika euaton agapa*
He who loves his wife loves himself

⁴⁷ The following is my translation.

⁴⁸ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 51–53. Pendant nominatives stand in front of the sentence to which they are logically (but not syntactically) connected, generally bringing emphasis to the element of the sentence (in this case, "He Himself" [*autos*]) to which they are logically linked.

⁴⁹ Verse 4:10b is subordinate to *ho anabas* ("the One who ascended") in 10a. It indicates the extraordinary extent—"far above all the heavens"—of "the ascender's" (*ho anabas*) ascent. Verse 4:10c indicates the *purpose* behind Christ's transcendent ascent just mentioned in 10b—"that he might fill all things."

Ephesians 4:10a

*ho katabas—autos estin kai ho anabas*The One who descended—He himself is also the
One who ascended

Both phrases begin with an articular participle—typical of many proverbs.⁵⁰ Ephesians 5:28 bears the standard proverbial form; 4:10a comes close. In both cases, the first and last word of the phrase are related, forming an *inclusio*.⁵¹ Verse 5:28b functions in context to reinforce an exhortation that had immediately preceded in 5:28a: “So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.” It appears as though 4:10 likewise functions to reinforce an immediately preceding exhortation made by way of the rhetorical question in 4:9.

If Paul intended 4:10a to function proverbially, then he intended his audience to understand that what 4:10 states specifically with respect to Christ and his descent and ascent should be generalized and applied to themselves: the one who humbles him- or herself in sacrifice for others will be rewarded with glory and honor by God. Verses 9–10 are thus seen to work together as a unit in Paul’s midrash. As was the case with the rhetorical question in 4:9, Paul’s primary purpose in using this quasi-proverb is that his audience understand that *Upsilon Vector mimēsis* is to be a paradigm for their own lives.

The Function of Ephesians 4:9–10 in Context

Ephesians 4:9–10 in the Context of 4:1–16

Ephesians 4:3 discloses Paul’s primary exhortative thrust for all of Ephesians 4:1–16: “. . . striving to preserve—in a peaceful bond—the unity that has been forged by the Spirit.”⁵² Christians are forged into “One new Man” via the Holy Spirit at their baptism. What God has joined together, man must not put asunder. Entrenched and often bitter differences of class, ethnicity, and religious backgrounds—among other things—meant that the prospect for divisions among the recipients of the letter was a very real and constant threat. Ephesians 4:3 is concerned with the practical matter of maintaining peaceful unity in local churches, a unity that is attainable only through humility and patience with one another’s weaknesses (4:2). Verse 3 functions as a kind of

⁵⁰ Many proverbial sayings in the OT and NT begin with a masculine nominative participle preceded by the definite article (as is the case here in Eph 4:10a). See, for example, LXX: Ps 36:22; Prov 10:10; 14:2; 17:5; 28:19; Sir 3:6; 4:15; 20:8; 32:15; Matt 10:37; Mark 16:16; Luke 10:16; 14:11; 22:26; John 3:18, 31, 36; 4:37; 12:25; 13:20; Rom 13:8; 14:6; 1 Cor 7:38; 14:4; 2 Cor 9:6; Gal 6:8; 1 Thess 5:7; 1 John 5:12; 3 John 1:11.

⁵¹ More precisely, 5:28b begins and ends with the same verb (*agapao*), 4:10 begins and ends with verbs that share the same root (*bainō*).

⁵² My translation.

“pole star” for all of 4:4–16, around which the other verses revolve. Though 4:4–16 could (mistakenly) be understood as primarily expository and instructional because of its theological richness, its rhetorical function is rather to reinforce—in various ways—the mandate of verse 3.

The many “ones” heaped up in 4:4–6 are specifically for *rhetorical* purposes. To notice this is crucial, and it is precisely at this point where interpreters often go astray, being unable to resist the temptation of trying to unlock the theological potentialities within all of these “ones.” Although the material in 4:4–6 cannot help but be theologically instructive, these verses function primarily as exhortative *rhetoric*, reinforcing the exhortation just given in verse 3. A summarizing appeal that might have followed verse 6—“therefore, again, preserve the *unity* that the Spirit has forged!”—is left unstated, but it can be drawn from a contextual awareness of verse 3 as the pole star of 4:1–16. Though echoing some of the letter’s earlier themes, Paul’s purpose in 4:4–6 is not to develop those themes. These verses function as *rhetoric*, working together to veritably pound into the audience the necessity of maintaining and strengthening peaceful ecclesial unity.

Interpreters who see the discussion in 4:4–6 shifting away from exhortation toward theological instruction and exposition invariably see this as continuing in 4:7–16 (shifting even further away from exhortation). However, if one does not lose sight of the pole star (4:3), then that which is circling around it (4:7–16) will be seen for what it is—formally instructional, but functionally rhetorical and exhortative—written in order to buttress the opening exhortation in verses 2–3, and particularly in verse 3.

Thus, in 4:7–16, Paul weaves the theme of *growth* into the primary theme of *unity* developed in 4:1–6. I emphasize “weaves in,” not “shifts to.” Ephesians 4:13 states that the gifts are given for, among other purposes, helping the Church attain “mature” or “perfected” manhood (*eis andra teleion*). But Paul also speaks in the same breath of the growth being “unified” in faith and in knowledge (4:13a).⁵³ Paul further speaks in 4:15 of Christians “growing into the head, Christ”; that is, the goal of this growth is bodily unity as well as unity with the head, Christ. In 4:16, Paul speaks of the whole body being “joined and held together,” again, the language of unity. So, even in 4:7–16, Paul does not depart for the earlier theme of ecclesial unity.

Further, Paul weaves in “subtle-but-not-to-be-missed” appeals to humility and self-sacrifice—keys to unity—throughout 4:7–16. These subtle appeals are just as important as the “teaching” about gifts. The gifts are “according to Christ’s measure.” That is to say, though all Christians have

⁵³ The word for “unified” does double duty here, acting on both “faith” and “knowledge.” See, for example, Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 184; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553–54; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

been gifted, and though some are more “visible” and, in that sense, perhaps “greater” than others (see 4:11–12), their source is Christ; they are his gifts to the Church, so there can be nothing to boast about. The gifts are given for the purpose of helping the body become mature and unified (4:13). In other words, the purpose of the gifts is to benefit others, not the ones gifted. Here again, pride and boasting are completely out of place. Further, the word “love” (*agapē*) keeps showing up, once in 4:15 and again in 4:16. Defined in general as “the quality of warm regard for and interest in another,”⁵⁴ in Ephesians, *agapē* and its cognate verb form, *agapaō*, begin to take on the aroma of self-donation and even sacrifice (see 4:2; 5:2, 25, 28).⁵⁵ The occurrence of *agapē* in 4:15 and 4:16, picking up on the *agapē* theme from 4:2 (as well as forming an inclusio), strongly suggests that just this sort of self-donating *agapē* love is a continued subject of exhortation.

But also of great importance, Paul brings forth via his midrash in 4:9–10 the visual example of Christ’s *descent*. By means of Christ’s descent, 4:9–10 reinforces the notions of humility, selflessness, and love mentioned earlier, in 4:2–3. Returning to emphasize an earlier topic was a standard rhetorical strategy in Paul’s day. This was done either by reintroducing a word or similar idea into one’s presentation or by concretely illustrating an earlier word or concept. George Kennedy comments:

A general audience will not understand even a simpler thesis when barely sketched. The speaker must therefore develop his subject, repeating his basic ideas several times in different words, *illustrating what he means*, relating it in some way to the experience of his audience.⁵⁶

In the case of Ephesians 4:9–10, describing Christ’s passion and death as his “descent” is that illustration. Christ’s descent in 4:9–10 provides a “centerpiece example” of the abstract term “love” that occurs at both ends of 4:1–16 (4:2 and 4:16). The descent also displays a visual model of the kind of humility to which the audience was exhorted in 4:2. Verses 9–10 show the specific kind of love and humility that will foster unity and growth in a Christian community.

Paul has introduced this midrash (4:9–10) into 4:1–16 because ecclesial unity was such an important concern in the passage (see 4:3–6, 13, 16) and elsewhere in the letter. Inasmuch as the death of Christ was *the* event that uni-

⁵⁴ See definition 1 under “ἀγάπη” in BDAG.

⁵⁵ Whether or not *agapē* and *agapaō* began to take on a specifically “Christian,” sacrificial, self-donating connotation in the early Church is debated; that it is used to denote self-sacrifice at several places in Ephesians, however, is not. See, for example, the TDNT entry at 1:51.

⁵⁶ George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 21–22 (my emphasis).

fied Jew and Gentile in reconciling both to God, it is fitting, and not especially surprising, that Paul would allude to Christ's death ("descent") in a passage so keenly concerned with ecclesial unity and growth.

Ephesians 4:1–16 in the Context of the Letter as a Whole

Paul has planned carefully for this moment (4:1–16) in his letter. He began by setting forth a catalogue of theological treasures shared by all Christians (1:3–23). Both the opening "blessing" (1:3–14) and the prayer report (1:15–23) work to disclose the "general" soteriological situation for Christians. Among the list of blessings that Paul mentions in Ephesians 1:3–23, what appears in 1:8b–10 stands out as somewhat unexpected, and therefore somewhat arresting:

8b In all wisdom and insight, 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, in accord with his favor that he set forth in him 10 as a plan for the fullness of times, to unite all things under Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.⁵⁷

In the midst of speaking about blessings such as election, adoption, redemption, and forgiveness, Paul lists an almost "gnostic" blessing, that God has let Christians in on what had formerly been a secret or "mystery" (*mystērion*; μυστήριον). If we follow his thought as it threads its way through verses 9–10, Paul is saying that God has finally made known the *mystery*, and this *mystery* is a divine *plan to unite all things under Christ*.⁵⁸ The word *mystērion* recalls the "mystery" revealed to Daniel about coming successive kingdoms followed by the advent of God's kingdom, which would shatter the former pagan kingdoms and become an international, worldwide kingdom that fills the earth.⁵⁹ The idea of *uniting all things under Christ*, within a context where Daniel's vision of successive kingdoms is recalled, draws to mind a renewed and restored *Davidic* kingdom in which all the kingdoms and peoples of the world are united under the rule and dominion of God's Messiah-King:

I myself have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain. . . . Ask it of me, and I will make your inheritance the nations, your possession the ends of the earth. . . . And now, kings, give heed; take warning, rulers on earth. Serve

⁵⁷ My translation, slightly revising the NAB.

⁵⁸ Most commentators are in general agreement with the assertions I make here about the "mystery" in Ephesians. See, for example, C. Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content*, Coniectanea biblica 8 (Lund, SE: Gleerup, 1977); Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 85–92; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 30–35; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 213–25; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 63–68.

⁵⁹ See Dan 2:1–48.

the LORD with fear; with trembling bow down in homage.
(excerpts, Psalm 2:6–11)

In Ephesians 1:8b–10, Paul has brought forth the “blessing” about the *revealed mystery* in his catalogue of blessings—albeit in a way that beckons the audience to deeper discovery as the letter proceeds—because it really is a *stupendous* blessing, and because he wants this divine mystery to be realized in Ephesus and Asia Minor, and because he knew that racial, ethnic, social, and class distinctions constantly threatened the ideal of *kingdom unity*—that is, the *plan to unite all things under Christ*. Ephesians 1:8b–10 strikes a chord that will resonate straight through to 4:16.

In 2:1–10, Paul is more direct and forceful in setting forth the soteriological benefits that have come to all Christians, Jew and Gentile alike. Once dead and children of wrath (that is, on their way to damnation), they have been made, via their faith and the efficacy of the Sacrament of Baptism, spiritually alive, reconciled to God, objects of his love and favor, participants of heavenly blessings, and on their way to Glory in heaven itself (2:1–7).

Paul’s rhetorical purpose in speaking about all of the soteriological blessings from 1:3 to 2:10 has not been to teach about these things per se, although that occurs. Rather, in drawing the minds of his Christian audience to the glorious patrimony that all of them—both Jew and Gentile—have come to share in, he hoped to prepare them for the discussion on unity in 2:11–22. The strongest emphasis on unity in the first half of the letter (chapters 1–3) is in 2:11–22. Here Paul asserts with ardent rhetoric that the barriers between Jew and Gentile have, in Christ, been *utterly abolished*. Both Jew and Gentile have access to *all* of the heavenly blessings he has been speaking of in 1:3–2:10. The *two* have now become *one* citizenry, *one* family, *one* Temple, *one* dwelling place for God in the Spirit (Eph 2:19–22).

In 3:1–21, Paul then discloses a prayer (with digression) that this one Temple might be “filled” with God’s fullness, before finally launching into the thunderous exhortation in 4:1–16 that his Christian audience work with all their hearts to maintain and promote the ecclesial unity into which they have been forged at baptism by the Holy Spirit. The cannon is loaded in chapters 1–3; the blast occurs in 4:1–16.

While the material in chapters 1–3 of Ephesians serves numerous functions, the chief function is to prepare for the *exhortation to unity* that Paul makes in 4:1–16. The unprecedented unity rhetoric in 4:1–16—and especially the contribution of his midrash exhorting to *Upsilon Vector mimēsis* in 4:9–10—flows from the pervasive unity themes that Paul has developed in chapters 1–3.⁶⁰ The material from 4:17 through the end of the letter shows

⁶⁰ Seen particularly in Eph 1:8b–10 and 2:11–22.

that Paul has concerns other than unity; but his supreme concern—the maintenance of ecclesial unity—has been addressed by 4:16.

