

The Study on the Structure of Ephesians in Terms of Rhetorical Analysis

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Abstract

Although there are many biblical studies on the interpretation of the content of *The Epistle to Ephesians*, few of them focus on the analysis of the structure of the letter, especially in the aspect of rhetorical analysis. Rhetorical analysis is a literary study on the content of writings in any form, which explores the author's purpose, the techniques he or she used, examples of those techniques, and the effectiveness of those techniques. Through this kind of analytical approach, Paul's purpose, his writing techniques, and the effectiveness of these techniques, which were presented or used in *Ephesians*, will be analyzed according to the study on the structure of the epistle. The thesis of *Ephesians* and its related details are discussed as to discover or identify the author's purpose and the related details that support the thesis. The analysis of the structure of the epistle helps us understand the composition of the writing, thus discovering the rhetorical pattern that presents the main idea in each passage of the letter. The coherence of the main ideas in different passages will be analysed so that the thesis of the whole epistle can be identified. Consequently, the author's purpose can be comprehended after the thesis of the letter is evident. The techniques Paul applied in his letter will be probed into in this paper as well, since they provide the tools necessary to analyse the relations between different contents of the passages. Most of these techniques are discussed in terms of syntactic structure and rhetorical form, which are helpful in realizing the author's ideas and the determining the effectiveness of the letter. From such an analytical approach, this paper may present a view different of *Ephesians* from those of biblical studies on the epistle in the past, possibly discovering a thesis of the letter in terms of linguistic analysis.

Key words: Hebrew rhetoric, Greco-Roman rhetoric, the syntactical structure, synonymous and antithetic parallelism, binary and parataxis

I. Introduction

A. The Characteristics of the Form of *Ephesians*

Compared with other Pauline epistles, the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (hereafter Ephesians) is a peculiar letter to more churches in Asia Minor as well as with a distinctive writing form and style. It differs from other epistles of Paul in two principal respects: 1. Its recipients are more universal ones instead of the specific ones; 2. Its writing style is unusual in syntactical structure as well as in rhetorical form. Some biblical scholars indicated that Ephesians was a circular letter, a doctrinal treatise in the form of a letter to the churches in Asia Minor. Raymond E. Brown analysed the recipients of the epistle and pointed out “Ephesians, the least situational, may have been the only one not directed to a destination more specific than to Christians (probably chiefly in Asia Minor) who regarded Paul as a great apostle.”¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson also pointed out that “Ephesians was originally a letter to more than one church, but that, unlike 1 Peter, a designation was not included, so that the churches that received it would not know it was a general letter also intended for them.”² In the fifth note of Ephesians 1: 1 of *the New Testament Recovery version* (hereafter RV), it reveals that the letter might be written to “the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus”³ instead of only to the saints in Ephesian. Therefore, unlike other Paul’s epistles in New Testament, his letter to Ephesians “does not explicitly address any specific problem.”⁴ Because its objects may be wider Christians in some churches of Minor Asia, it was defined by some scholars as a circular letter that was used to manifest the doctrine of church and the reconciliation between God and humans in Christ. In other words, the purpose of the letter is for revealing the truth concerning the relationship between Christ and the church instead of solving certain problems occurring in a specific local church. Accordingly, the rhetoric form of this letter is primary to inform the teaching of the apostle’s knowledge and experience of Christ and church in terms of “God’s grand vision

¹ Raymond E. Brown. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (NY: Doubleday, 1997), p. 627.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green & Marianne Meye Thompson. *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans 2001). pp. 381-382; Raymond E. Brown. pp. 621-622.

³ The second note of Ephesians: 1: 1, RV, p. 848.

⁴ NIV, p. 2396.

of cosmic peace and unity in Christ.”⁵ Since the objects of a letter affect an author’s purpose, it is significant to realize the recipients Paul might write to while writing Ephesians.

Another difference between Ephesians and other Pauline letters is that its writing style is more unusual than other Pauline epistles. The writing style of Ephesians is more complicated and lengthy in the content and syntax of the sentences. Warren Carter and Amy-Jill Levine indicated that “Ephesians manifests a substantially different style. By one count, 9 of its 100 sentences (in Greek) have 50 or more words....One such example is Ephesians 4: 11-16, which most English translations divide into multiple sentences, but is one sentence in Greek.”⁶ Achtemeier and others also analyzed the distinction of the writing style of Ephesians as “the style of Greek in which Ephesians is writing noticeably different from that of Paul’s major letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians). Ephesians has long, rambling sentences, written almost liturgical style.”⁷ Therefore, the complex, long sentences in Ephesians reveal the distinctive syntactical structure that is applied to present a different idea from those manifesting in other Pauline epistles which are specific to the problems of the local churches.

Because the purpose of Ephesians is to reveal a more universal truth or doctrine concerning the church on the universal level, the content of the letter is employed to explicate a cosmic truth instead of the admonition to a specific church. Consequently, the content of the epistle is full of the elaboration of the truth the apostle tried to present. Achtemeier and others analyzed the aspect of the universality of the truth of Ephesians: “The letter is an excellent summary of Paul’s thought about the universal significance of the Christian faith.”⁸ Similarly, Brown further pointed out that “What he[Paul] writes is not so much praise of the recipients as enthusiastic evaluation of what has been achieved in Christ for all Christians and indeed for the whole universe.”⁹

As rhetorical analysis is applied to explore a writer’s purpose or goal, the techniques

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Warren Carter and Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), pp. 184-185.

⁷ Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, p. 379.

⁸ Ibid. p. 380.

⁹ H. L. Hendrix, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42 (1988), pp. 3-15. Adopted from Raymond E. Brown, p. 631.

used, the examples of those techniques, and the effectiveness of those techniques, the writer's purpose of Ephesians, the rhetorical techniques he applied, the examples related to these techniques and the effectiveness of these techniques will be analyzed in terms of the thesis or main ideas of the letter as well as of the linguistic and grammatical respects.

The structure and form of Ephesians can be discovered through the above rhetorical analysis. At the same time, the thesis of the letter can be revealed through such an analysis which probes the purpose of the writer, which is closely related to the thesis of the epistle. On the other hand, according to Peter Matter and Rita McCarthy's definition of the rhetorical modes, most writers choose a rhetorical mode of writing which helps them achieve their purpose and there are four main rhetorical modes including narration, description, exposition, and persuasion.¹⁰ Hence, the purpose of a writer can affect the rhetorical modes he chooses. The different rhetorical modes then influence the approaches of presenting the content. For example, an author who is trying to explain something "will likely use an expository mode. Expository writing explains ideas and how things work. It is more likely to be logical and factual."¹¹ Therefore, the approaches of presenting the content of a writing is related to the usage of rhetorical techniques. Through the analysis of the rhetorical modes and the related approaches, an author's purpose and the related techniques an author applied can be comprehended. In addition, the structure and form can be inferred from the analysis of Paul's purpose and the related rhetorical techniques manifested in the rhetorical modes suggested in the letter.

Unlike many biblical researches on the exegesis of theology and the translation of the Bible, this study emphasizes the interpretation of Ephesians in terms of rhetorical analysis. This kind of rhetorical analysis provides another different angle to interpret the content of Ephesians and their relation to the thesis of the epistle. In other words, Not only the structure of the letter can be discovered, but also the thesis can be revealed through such a rhetorical analysis. In reality, the thesis or main ideas may be presented more objectively without being involved into different theological aspects. On the other hand, the relation between the purpose of the writer of Ephesians and the rhetorical techniques he employed in the letter can

¹⁰ Peter Mather and Rita Mccarthy, *The Art of Critical Reading* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2009), pp. 124-124.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

also be analysed so as to comprehend the effectiveness of such rhetorical techniques.

Though the analysis of the structure of the letter covers the whole epistle, the scope of analysing the rhetorical techniques used in the letter is limited to the research on the first two chapters of Ephesians partly because of the abundance of the content of the letter and partly because of the limitation of the length of the paper. However, the examples and related rhetorical skills manifested in Ephesians 1 and 2 are enough to present the principal rhetorical techniques applied in the epistle. The writer's purpose manifested in these two chapters can be analysed in terms of these rhetorical skills as well.

B. Literature Review

Some biblical scholars agreed that the structure of Ephesians followed the format of Hellenistic epistles composed of the opening formula with author's thanksgiving in the beginning of the letter, the body as a circular letter, and doctrinal treaties in the form of a letter to the churches in Asia. Brown pointed out that "The Opening Formula of the Greco-Roman letter consisted of three basic elements (sender, addressee, greeting). Although sometimes another element extends the greeting, e.g. one remembering the addressee, or wishing good health to the addressee."¹² Achtemeier and others also indicated that "the letter [Ephesians] does not include further comments on either receivers and thus resembles the normal Hellenistic letter opening."¹³ Grant R. Osborne explained the influence of Hellenistic style of epistle on the New Testament: "The closest parallel to the New Testament is found in Hellenistic epistolary practice....By the time of Jesus and Paul this literary epistle had become very popular....This tradition is important for the New Testament epistolary tradition."¹⁴

However, the content of the opening formula, body and the concluding formula of Ephesians are different from those of Hellenistic letters. As Brown explained the difference as

¹² Raymond E. Brown, p. 412.

¹³ Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, p. 381.

¹⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Derived from www.IVPpress.com/academic.

In the Greco-Roman personal letter, still within the Opening Formula, the greeting was often expanded by a remembrance or a health wish as the sender prayer for the health of the addressee....While lacking remembrance and health wishes, most NT letters expanded one or other element in the Opening Formula by attaching the high status and privileges of Christians, e.g. Paul “set apart for the gospel of God,” “Grace and peace from the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins.”¹⁵

Osborne also emphasized the distinction between the Hellenistic epistolary form and Pauline letters: “The epistles of Paul do not merely reproduce earlier patterns....Paul’s letters are new in so far as form (introductory and closing formulae), content (variety and intensity of material in a single letter), or length (beyond the usual length even of the more literary-minded writers) is concerned”¹⁶ Accordingly, though Ephesians also has the pattern of Hellenistic epistles, the content, form and syntactical structure are different from those of Hellenistic letters.

Some biblical researches analyzed Pauline letters in relation to the rhetorical form of Greco-Roman. Corin Mihaila analyzed the influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric on one of Pauline letters.¹⁷ Mihaila surveyed three kinds of Paul’s attitude toward Hellenistic rhetoric.¹⁸ Achtemeier and others studied the Pauline writing form and attributed it to Greco-Roman style: “Paul uses vocabulary associated with the popularized Platonism of the Greco-Roman world (e.g. the contrast between flesh and spirit in Rom 8: 9-13) and reflects the attitude of indifference to worldly relationships often urged by Stoic philosophers (e.g. 1 Cor. 7: 29-31, 2 Cor 6: 10).”¹⁹ Brown also associated Pauline epistles with Greco-Roman rhetoric modes: “The ancient rhetorical handbook shows a wide range of Greco-Roman letter types; e.g. letters conveying praise, correction, argumentation, information, etc. so that a homely meant to persuade can be cast in a letter format.”²⁰ He further pointed out that “Aristotle distinguish three modes of argumentation in rhetoric, and recently scholars have sought to apply these to

¹⁵ Raymond E. Brown, pp. 414-415.

¹⁶ Grant R. Osborne. Derived from www.IVPpress.com/academic.

¹⁷ Corin Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollo Relationship and Paul’s Stance Toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 61-94.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 119-146.

¹⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, p. 294.

²⁰ Raymond E. Brown, p. 410.

NT letters.”²¹ These three modes of argumentation include Judicial or forensic argumentation, deliberate or hortatory (paraenetic) argumentation, and demonstrative or epideictic argumentation.²²

However, other biblical scholars presented a different point of view concerning the rhetorical form applied in Pauline letters. Roland Meynet indicated that “there is a Hebrew rhetoric, distinctive from the Greco-Roman rhetoric....and those of the New Testament obey the same organizational law as those of the Hebrew Bible.”²³ John Jebb and Thomas Boys also proved that the texts of the New Testament obey the same rules as those of the Old.²⁴ Meynet emphasized that the writers of the New Testament were “essentially followed the ways of writing of the cultural environments in which they were educated and of the literature with which they were nourished.”²⁵ Hebrew rhetoric, as Mynet pointed out, is quite different from that of Greco-Roman because of different motivation of presentation. He summarized the distinction between the Greco-Roman rhetoric and Semitic (or called Hebrew) rhetoric in the following statements:

*The Greek demonstrates, the Jew indicates. The Greek intends to convince his hearers, to lead them along a straight line, by means of logical reasoning, following a demonstration based on a whole series of proofs, to a conclusion which ought to compel them to agree. The Jew, on the contrary, is content to show the way which the one wishing to understand may take.*²⁶

In other words, the Hebrew rhetoric is applied to reveal the ideas or facts instead of proving the idea true or correct. Therefore, different approaches of manifesting ideas or reality bring about different rhetorical techniques.

The above review of the contemporary analyses of Pauline letters reveals that there are two different point of views regarding the rhetorical techniques and rhetorical structure. The contrary rhetorical forms and skills are not as obvious as they seem to be. In reality, both

²¹ Ibid. p. 411.

²² Ibid.

²³ Roland Meynet, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 173

²⁴ I am indebted to Roland Meynet, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*. p. 173.

²⁵ Roland Meynet, *Treaties on Biblical Rhetoric*. (NY: Brill, 2012) p. 7.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

rhetorical techniques and forms can be discovered from the content of Ephesians. In other words, the Greco-Roman epistle form provides the frame of the letter while the Hebrew rhetorical techniques facilitates the apostle to present his ideas and exhortation to the believers at that era. Therefore, this study will probe the content and context of Ephesians in the aspect of both Greco-Roman rhetoric and Hebrew rhetoric so as to manifest the relation between the Paul's purpose and his rhetorical techniques used in the letter. As a result, the thesis of the letter can be revealed through such an analysis.

II. The Structure and Pattern Revealed in Ephesians

Regarding the structure of the letter, Brown divided the body of the epistle into two sections: The indicative section of the body (2: 1-3: 21) and the imperative or paraenetic section (4:1-6:20). He classified the first section as the part for instructions; the second as the part for exhortation or paraenesis. Compared with Brown's division in terms of the rhetoric style, Achtemeier and others also divided the body of the letter into two parts on the basis of the content of the letter in the aspect of Paul's theological thought.²⁷ They analysed the content of the body of the letter as "the first contains what amounts to a series of meditations on the meaning of Christ both for Christians and for cosmological powers."²⁸ The second part, on the other hand, "is concerned with how the realities described in the first part impinge on the behaviour of Christians as they seek to live lives worthy of the grace God has showered on them in Christ."²⁹ The above two types of division of the body of *Ephesians* suggest two kinds of content: The first one of Brown's presents the purpose of the author; the second one reveals the main idea or thesis of the content of the letter. In other words, the former one manifests the writer's purpose to inform his readers (the believers) of the vision and the revelation Paul understood and experienced, which is concerning God's will related to the mystery of Christ and church. The latter one then directly presents the author's main idea or thesis, which can be fulfilled in believers' daily walk and life.

In general, a writing usually contains a thesis as its main subject. However, Pauline

²⁷ Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, p. 381.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. p.385.

epistles are particularly long and complicated in their content. As a result, they frequently have other specific purposes besides general purpose. Peter Mather and Rita McCarthy explained such a condition: “In addition to general purpose, authors also usually have a specific purpose, which reveals more detailed information about the article than the general purpose.”³⁰ Because the body of *Ephesians* is composed of two main parts, they have their own focus respectively. Actually, the author’s purpose of each part is different from each other as mentioned previously. Nevertheless, this does not indicate that the author does not have a main idea in his writing. Peter Mather and Rita McCarthy pointed out that “Sometimes an author may have more than one purpose in mind ... usually one of the author’s purposes will be primary. To determine the general purpose or primary purpose, first identify the main idea and the key details that support that idea.”³¹ Consequently, identifying a main idea from a writing is very crucial in discovering the thesis of a writing. Considering the main idea of *Ephesians*, Paul’s primary purpose and specific purpose should be distinguished from each other, that is, what is the relation between the primary purpose and specific purpose.

Under the definition of Peter Mather, a general purpose obviously covers a wider and holistic intention of an author in his writing compared with a specific purpose. In other words, a specific purpose is an extension of an author’s principal purpose. In *Ephesians* the general or main purpose is to convey the doctrine or teaching of Paul’s theology. And Paul’s doctrine of his theology, as some biblical scholars indicated,³² is principally revealed in the first part of the body of *Ephesians*. According to the outlines of *NIV (the Bible of New International Version)*, *KJB (New King James Study Bible)* and *RV (The New Testament: Recovery Version)*, the first part of Paul’s doctrines of theological thought and truth are from *Ephesians* 1:3-3:21 and the second part initiates from 4:1-6:20.³³ Though the contents of the outline of different biblical versions are different, the division of the two parts is all the same. Similarly, the purpose of both parts in different Bibles is almost the same, that is, the first part is for the

³⁰ Peter Mather and Rita McCarthy, p.120.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Paul J. Achtemeier and et al. p. 382; Raymond E. Brown, p. 623.

³³ D. A. Carson and et al. ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015), p. 2398; Charles Caldwell Ryrie ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (King James Version) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 1672; Witness Lee ed., *The New Testament* (Recovery Version) (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1991), pp. 845-846.

revelation of the apostle's doctrine; the second part is for the conduct of the daily walk and household of Christian life. Hence, the purpose of the first part can be attributed to manifesting Paul's primary purpose to teach the Christians in Ephesian the spiritual truth concerning God, Christ and the church and the relation among them. The second part, on the other hand, is for the specific purpose to exhort Christian to practice those spiritual truth in their daily living as well as in their ethical relationships.

As the purpose of the first section of Ephesians is to reveal the main theological reality Paul attempted to manifest to the believers, the rhetorical mode employed in this section is that of exposition. Mather and McCarthy explicated the application of an expository mode: "An author who is trying to explain something will likely use an expository mode. Expository writing explains ideas and how things work. It is more likely to be logical and factual."³⁴ As mentioned above, the general purpose of the content of the first part of Ephesians is to reveal the principal truth concerning God's will, Christ redemption and the building of the church. Therefore, the relation among these themes is connected to one another through a logical sequence among the passages in Ephesians 1:3-2:22. The logical sequence is revealed in the pattern of organization which presents a syntactical connection as well as a coherence of the meaning among the context of a passage. Then, the main ideas of the passages of these verses of the epistle can be revealed. Simultaneously, the purpose of the writer of Ephesians can be seen through such an analysis.

Mather and McCarthy indicated that there are eight types of common patterns of organization, four of which can be related to the patterns of organization employed in Ephesians: The patterns of cause and effect, of comparison and contrast, of examples and illustration, and of definition. These patterns of organization will be applied to explain the logical sequence and the coherence of meaning among the context of the passages in *Ephesians* 1: 3-2: 22. In reality, the mixed modes of these patterns are indispensable to be used in this part of the letter because the complexity of the structure of the long sentences of the letter so as to comprehend the relation or connection among different passages.

According to the above pattern of organization, the pattern of Chapter One of Ephesians

³⁴ Peter Mather and Rita McCarthy, p. 124.

(1: 3-23) can be attributed to that of cause and effect. All the spiritual blessings in Christ, which is indicated in Ephesians 1: 3, refer to the effect or result of God's will, Christ redemption, and the seal of the Spirit, which described in Ephesians 1: 4-14. In these verses Christ's redemption, believers as God's inheritance, and believers' predestination to be children of God according to God's good pleasure of His will are related to one another as a process that eventually brings about all the spiritual blessings in Christ. In other words, because of God's will, He predestinated the people as His children before the creation of the world. After that, believers inherit God as their inheritance through Christ's redemption and eventually this kind of inheritance is guaranteed by the promised Holy Spirit which is a pledge of believers as God's inheritance. This process reveals the cause of the result, all the spiritual blessings in Christ.

The other verses like Ephesians 1: 8-10, 12 reveal the apostle's anticipation of the believers to fully comprehend the mystery of God's will. These verses are applied to emphasize the significance of the believers' vision of their spiritual blessings as the above process manifests as well as Christ supreme status over all things. Hence, the main idea revealed in Ephesians 1: 4-14 is how believers obtained their spiritual blessings from God through Christ's redemption.

In addition to the above pattern of the passage, a rhetorical technique employed in these verses is the repetition of the similar ideas in different aspects. The following verses 1: 16-18 reinforce Paul's incessant intercession for the believers' enlightenment of this kind of spiritual inheritance. The context of these verse, in fact, reiterates the idea of the previous verses 1: 8-9, that is, God's wish for Christ's redemption and Him as believers' inheritance: "With all wisdom and understanding, He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ."³⁵ This kind of repetition is used to emphasize the significance of the main idea the writer tried to reveal. Osborne analysed rhetorical skills manifested in the Paul's epistles and commented that "Repetition can be organized around either sound or idea. Repetition may have been used for emphasis, and the difference between

³⁵ Ephesians 1: 8-9, NIV, p. 2400.

the terms should not be stressed.”³⁶ In reality, in Ephesians 1: 8 the apostle already presented God’s wish to make His chosen people know the mystery of His will with all His wisdom and understanding. From the context of these verses, the mystery refers to God as His children’s inheritance through Christ’s redemption. Paul presented this wish in the aspect of God in this verse. In the note of Ephesians 1: 9 in NIV the mystery of God’s will is interpreted as “the central focus of God’s mystery is the fulfilment of his plan of salvation in Christ.”³⁷ In addition, in the second note of the same verse in *RV* the mystery is elaborately explicated as “He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.”³⁸ On the other hand, in Ephesians 1: 17 the apostle also revealed the identical aspect concerning believers’ inheritance through Christ’s salvation in the aspect of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation given by God to believers. This is revealed in Paul’s prayer for the believers’ enlightenment of the glorious divine inheritance and Christ’s calling according to the gift of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Accordingly, the similar idea is reiterated in a binary aspects: From the aspect of God’s wish and from that of the apostle’s anticipation revealed in his intercession. Both wishes refer to the same spiritual blessings: God as believers’ inheritance through Christ’s redemption.

Another reiteration of Christ’s status emerges in Ephesians 1: 20-22 that manifest Christ’s exaltation over all things: “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”³⁹ A. E. Harvey pointed out that Christ was proved to be superior to all other powers when God raised him from the dead and set him in the heavenly places which is the highest place in the universe.⁴⁰ The exaltation of Christ also appears in the preceding verse 1: 10: “Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him.”⁴¹

³⁶ Grant R. Osborne, Derived from www.IVPpress.com/academic.

³⁷ NIV, p. 2400.

³⁸ *RV*, p. 851.

³⁹ *KJB*, p. 1674.

⁴⁰ A. E. Harvey, *A Companion to the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 614-615.

⁴¹ *RV*, p. 851.

Although the descriptions of Ephesians 1: 10 and 20-22 are different, they all depicted Christ's supremacy over all things, that is, it is God that put all things under his feet as well as headed up all things in Christ.

Furthermore, even the delineation of the things Christ exalts over is identical, that is, the prepositional phrase 'far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named in this world' in Ephesians 1: 21 corresponds to 'the things in the heavens and the things on the earth not only in this world' in their meaning. In the first note of Ephesians 1: 21 in RV, this verse is explained as referring to "not only angelic, heavenly authorities, whether good or evil, but also the human, earthly ones."⁴² In other words, 'all principality and power, and might, and dominion' is similar to 'the things in the heaven' in their meaning and 'every name that is named in this world' echoes the 'the things on the earth.'

The form of Hebrew rhetoric can be discovered in this kind of similar description and explanation of the inheritance of believers through Christ's redemption as well as Christ's supremacy over all powers and things regardless of different words and phrases in such depiction presented in these different verses. As Meynet indicated:

*The characteristics of Hebrew rhetoric is the specific manner in which it composes parallel dispositions and most of all concentrical arrangement. Instead of developing its argumentation in a linear way, in the Greco-Roman fashion, to conclusion which is a point of resolution of the discourse, it is organized most of the time in an involutive manner around a center which is the focal point, the keystone, through which the rest finds cohesion. The center of a concentric construction most of the time presents certain specific characteristics: it is often of a different shape and genre than the rest of the text.*⁴³

As mentioned above, both concentrical arrangement and parallel dispositions are the characteristics and the composition of Hebrew rhetoric. Because concentrical arrangement is

⁴² RV, p. 856.

⁴³ Roland Meynet, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*. p. 175.

organized in an involutive manner around a center, the focal point, the rest of a passage is related to such a focal point. This kind of Hebrew rhetoric also appears in Ephesians 1: 3-14. According to the note of Ephesians 1: 3-14 in NIV, the passages is titled as ‘Praise for Spiritual Blessings’ and is explicated as

Appearing as one long sentence in the original Greek, this section is often called a ‘doxology’...These blessings are based on the work of the triune God: election and adoption by the Father (vv. 4-6), redemption of Christ (vv. 7-2), and sealing in the Spirit (vv. 13-14). This entire section presents a grand sweep of God’s saving purposes.”⁴⁴

Hence, the spiritual blessings are the focal point of Ephesians 1: 3-14. Osborne also pointed out the complicated structure of the lengthy sentence in Ephesians 1: 3-14 and analysed the writer’s intention in this kind of writing style: “Ephesians 1: 3-14 constitutes the longest sentence ever discovered in the Greek language....Paul, in his exuberance over these incredible dogmatic truths, simply kept writing one subordinate clause after another in his desire to get his point across.”⁴⁵ Hence, nearly all the subordinate clauses are applied to make the focal point of this long sentence clear.

In fact, almost all the verses (1: 3-14) are written in subordinate clauses to describe or explain the focal point, all spiritual blessings, except Ephesians 1: 3. This verse is presented in an inverted sentence as to stress the subject ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”⁴⁶ The focal point of the whole sentence also appears in this verse: all spiritual blessings. After the verse, the following verses are presented in subordinate clauses that are used to explain or describe the focal point: the spiritual blessings including God’s election, His predestination, Christ’s redemption, Christ’s union of all things in him, and the seal of the Spirit.

This kind of sentence structure manifests the characteristics of Hebrew rhetoric, that is,

⁴⁴ NIV, p. 2399.

⁴⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham, 2017). P. 11.

⁴⁶ KJB, p. 1673.

the sentence is organized in an involutive way around a focal point. According to the involutive development of a sentence, the content of the rest of the subordinate clauses in Ephesians 1: 4-14 is around the key point, all spiritual blessings. This forms a concentric arrangement that reveals the reiteration of the content, God as believers' inheritance through Christ's redemption, which emerges at the beginning, the middle, and the end of Ephesians 1: 5-14. At the same time, the construction of concentric arrangement reveals a different shape of the sentence, that is, the complicated, lengthy sentence with many subordinate clauses to present the repeated content of the spiritual blessings.

Similarly, the concentric form can be related to the following verses Ephesians 1: 15-23 which is another extensive, complex sentence. As analysed above, God's wish and Paul's anticipation for the believers' enlightenment of the spiritual blessings are presented in different verses (1: 8-9 and 1: 17-18) but manifests a similar wish. In addition, this kind of reiteration also reveals another focal point concerning Christ's unique status in God's will: Christ's supremacy over all things and the union of all things in him, both of which appear in different sentences (1: 10 and 1: 22). Such reiteration of the similar things around a focal point is the feature of concentric form.

As a result, the repetition of the similar ideas in Ephesians 1: 3-23 is not redundant but emphatic in their meaning. Meynet explained this point: "The Hebrew rhetoric lies essentially in the disposition of the units and in the repetitions, mostly lexical, between symmetrical units."⁴⁷ Therefore, according to the sentence structure, the first chapter of Ephesians can be divided into two units or segments: one is 1: 3-14; the other is 1: 15-23. In their original Greek language each unit of verses is composed of one sentence. In each sentence the focal point is similar in their idea and is reiterated by the writer with different expression. This is one of the characteristics of Hebrew rhetoric.

III. The Rhetorical Techniques Applied in Ephesians

Another pattern of organization frequently appearing in Pauline letters is that of comparison and contrast. This pattern also emerges in Ephesians 2: 1-7 which is a long,

⁴⁷ Roland Meynet, pp. 175-176.

complex sentence in its original Greek language.⁴⁸ These verses are presented in the juxtaposition of two opposite conditions that reveals a sharp contrast between the conditions before and after the believers' conversion to Christians. These two contrary conditions are described in three verses respectively in a symmetrical way, that is, the corrupted condition before Christ saved them, which is depicted in the first three verses of Chapter two as well as God's grace and mercy through Christ's redemption that saved the believers from sins and death, which is manifested in the latter four verse 2: 4-7. The delineation of the two opposite conditions is connected to each other with the conjunction 'but' in 2: 4: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where with which he loved us."⁴⁹ As 'but' is used to connect two different sentences in contrary meaning, so the contrast between the believers before and after their being redeemed by Christ is obviously highlighted in the verses before and after 'but.'

The juxtaposition of the opposite conditions of the believers in order to reveal a sharp contrast is one of Hebrew rhetorical techniques. Meynet pointed out that one of the characteristics of Hebrew rhetoric is that

It uses parataxis more than syntax.... That is to say, it juxtaposes or coordinates more than it subordinates. In other words, it does not always express the logical relations in the same way that Greek rhetoric does, using words such as are used in a syllogism or a enthymeme: 'Given that....it follows that, 'whereas,' 'therefore,' 'consequently.'"⁵⁰

Ephesians 2: 1-7 is a complicated lengthy sentence composed of several subordinate clauses. These subordinate clauses are employed to modify the antecedents placed before the subordinate clauses, such as 'your offenses and sins in which...', 'the sons of disobedience among whom...', and 'God who is....' The details of the fallen condition of the believers in the past is juxtaposed altogether without conjunctions to connect them in the logical relation. In other words, there are no apparent conjunctions to connect a premise and a conclusion in the long sentence. Instead, the contrary conditions of the believers before and after their

⁴⁸ According to Grant, Ephesians 2: 1-7 is an "extensive, complex sentence" as well. See Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*. (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham, 2017). p. 11.

⁴⁹ KJB, p. 1674.

⁵⁰ Roland Meynet, p. 175.

believing in Christ are embodied in the juxtaposition of their opposite conditions, which obviously highlights the distinction between these two conditions. This kind of paratactic way of presenting the contrast in Ephesians 2: 1-7 is the feature of Hebrew rhetoric.

However, though there is no obvious conjunctions as connectors to string the meaning of the statements in Ephesians 2: 1-10, there is still a logical relation among the context of these verses. This kind of logic relation is presented in Hebrew rhetorical techniques: Hebrew parallelism. Robert Lowth categorized Hebrew parallelism as three types: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic⁵¹ Synonymous parallelism includes the repetition in the second part of what has already been presented in the first part while only changing the words. According to synonymous parallelism, Ephesians 2: 2-3 can be seen as the disposition of synonymous parallelism. The arrangement of these verses reveals that the content of 2: 3 is the iteration of 2: 2 yet in a different expression:

In which you once walked according to the age [or course] of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience; (2: 2)

Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, were by nature children of wrath, (2: 3)⁵²

The above verses manifest the similar behavior the believers once had before they

became Christians. The sentence ‘we also all conducted ourselves once’ is identical to that of ‘you once walked’ in their meaning. At the same time, ‘in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts’ is also equal to ‘according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit’ in their idea. According to the note of Ephesians 2: 2 in RV and KJB, both the ruler of the authority of the air and of the spirit refer to Satan and his related evil spiritual powers.⁵³ Accordingly, conducting in the lust of our flesh and doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts is similar to walking according to the course of this evil world and its ruler Satan. In addition, ‘the children of

⁵¹ Robert Lowth, *Lecture on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrew* (Boston: J. T. Buckingham, 1815), p. 259.

⁵² RV, pp. 857-858.

⁵³ RV, p. 858; KJB, p. 1674.

wrath' echoes 'the sons of disobedience' in their meaning. In the fourth note of Ephesians 2: 3 in RV, 'the sons of disobedience' is also interpreted as 'the children of wrath': "As the sons of disobedience, we were also the children of wrath. In the realm of death we were under God's wrath because of our disobedience."⁵⁴ Consequently, these two verses resemble each other in their general meaning through the parallel of the similar content.

The main idea in this passage (2: 1-10) is revealed through such a synonymous parallel of the similar description of the corrupted conduct the believers once had as well as the juxtaposition of the opposite condition of the believers before and after they were saved by Christ. The reiteration of the fallen walk once the believers lived in reinforces the distinction of the salvation they obtained from Christ. Compared with the corrupted behavior of the believers, the grace mentioned in Ephesians 2: 5, 7-8 becomes a sharp contrast to show the significance of grace gifted from God. As a result, Ephesians 2: 8 can be regarded as a conclusion of the passage where the apostle emphasized the reason of their being redeemed: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."⁵⁵ Therefore, Paul exhorted the believers to "do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."⁵⁶ Doing good works reveals the proper behavior that the believers should have after their conversion and simultaneously it also manifests Paul's expectation after his presenting the preceding contrast.

In addition to the Hebrew rhetorical techniques of juxtaposition and parallelism, binary is another Hebrew rhetorical technique frequently appearing in Ephesians. Meynet pointed out that "Binary is not a fact to be found here and there; it pervades the whole field of the biblical text."⁵⁷ According to his definition of the rhetorical technique binary, it is a strong expression of several "coordinated words forming a kind of stock phrase, almost a syntHEME.... Another example is 'justice and right' (Ps. 33: 5). In the New Testament one can cite two opposite couples: 'publicans and sinners' and 'scribes' and 'Pharisees' (e.g. Luke: 15: 1-2)."⁵⁸

In the following verses of Chapter two (Ephesians 2: 11-22), the rhetorical technique

⁵⁴ RV, p. p. 858.

⁵⁵ NIV, p. 2402.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Roland Meynet, *Treaties on Biblical Rhetoric*. p. 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 9

binary will be discussed and reveals its relation to the meaning of these verses. In Ephesians 2: 11 the contrast between Gentiles and Jews is manifested in the presentation of 'uncircumcised' and 'circumcised': "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is done in the body by human hands). The opposite terms 'uncircumcised' and 'circumcised' can be seen as a kind of binary that manifests a contrast. In addition, Ephesians 2: 13 also reveals a contrast by describing the Gentile believers' condition before and after Christ's redemption: "But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ."⁵⁹ 'Far off' and 'near' as well as 'now' and 'once' presented in the same sentence not only reveal the great shift from the past condition depicted in the former verse (2: 12) to the contemporary condition--in Christ, but also manifest the sharp contrast of the new status of the Gentile believers through the blood of Christ. The similar description emerges in Ephesians 2: 17 where the binary description is more obvious: "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."⁶⁰ According to the note of this verse in NIV, the people who were far away and those who were near are referred to Gentiles and Jews respectively.⁶¹ Hence, the opposite couple of phrases here is a typical binary expression which presents a sharp contrast.

In addition to the Hebrew rhetorical technique binarity, hendiadys is another Hebrew rhetorical technique applied in Ephesians. Meynet explicated the form and function of the technique: "hendiadys consists in combining two words, nouns or verbs, while semantically one is subordinate to the other....Hendiadys is the most elementary form of parataxis. Actually, instead of being subordinate the two terms in this figure are simply juxtaposed or coordinated."⁶² The noun phrase 'offenses and sins' in Ephesians 2: 1 is the form of hendiadys that expresses the sinful condition of the Gentile believers before they believed in Christ. In reality, it is an emphatic expression with a pair of synonymous words. Another form of hendiadys also appears in Ephesians 2: 19: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of

⁵⁹ RV, p. 861.

⁶⁰ NIV, p. 2403.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Roland Meynet, *Treaties on Biblical Rhetoric*. p. 16.

God”⁶³ The phrase ‘strangers and sojourners’ is applied to describe the unbelievers or Gentiles who were regarded as the people outside God’s kingdom and family. In other words, strangers and sojourners are synonymous words that form a type of hendiadys.

In addition, there is a sharp contrast emerging in Ephesians 2: 19, which reveals a kind of antithetic parallelism as Meynet mentioned in his book.⁶⁴ He explained antithetic parallelism as “a thing is illustrated by its contrary being opposed to it. This is not confined to any particular form: for sentiment are opposed to sentiment, words to words...”⁶⁵ He made an example as in the following:

The blows of a friend are faithful;

But the kisses of an enemy are treacherous. (Prov. 27: 6)

Similar to this kind of expression, Ephesians 2: 19 can be seen as another antithetic parallel as the following verses are shown:

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners,

but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

As ‘a friend’ is opposite ‘an enemy’ in Proverb 27: 6, so ‘strangers’ are contrary to ‘fellow citizens’ in Ephesians 2: 19. Similarly, the two contrary words ‘faithful’ and ‘treacherous’ forms another antithetic parallel. On the other hand, ‘sojourners’ are opposite ‘members of the household of God.’ The relationship of Gentile believers with God is obviously manifested in this kind of contrast.

The metaphors Paul used in Ephesians suggest significant ideas concerning the main idea or thesis of the letter. First of all, the metaphors, head and body, refers to the relationship between Christ and the church appearing in Ephesians 1: 22-23. These metaphors are reiterated in Ephesians 2: 16 which reveals the important main idea of the whole letter: Both Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in one body of Christ through Christ’s redemption that broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles. This thesis is connected

⁶³ RV, p. 864,

⁶⁴ Roland Meynet, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

to the following content of the epistle and is a very significant central line of Paul's development of his thought in the letter.⁶⁶

Another important metaphor is the cross which symbolized Christ's death. In Ephesians 2: 16 the cross refers to the death of Christ that abolished "the law of commandments contained in ordinances"⁶⁷ and thus both Jews and Gentiles might be reconciled in one body of Christ through his death. In the fourth note of Ephesians 2: 16 in RV, the relation between the ordinance and the cross is explicated as "The cross of Christ slew the enmity caused by the ordinance....It was through the cross that both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled in one Body to God."⁶⁸ Accordingly, Christ's death is essential to the reconciliation of the Jews and the Gentiles in one body of Christ.

Though metaphors are a type of common rhetorical technique employed in both classical and modern literary rhetoric, the metaphors used in Ephesians still differ from those used in Greco-Roman and modern times. According to Meynet's explanation, the characteristics of Hebrew rhetoric "that distinguished it from classical rhetoric: it is more concrete than abstract" because "Hebrew literature is essentially concrete."⁶⁹ For example, 'heaven and earth' frequently used in the Bible expresses the meaning 'everywhere' and 'night and day' denotes 'always.' Therefore, the metaphors applied in Ephesians also manifest such concrete things, such as head and body, the middle wall, and cross. This kind of metaphor can embody the ideas a writer intends to present. In reality, the head and body and the cross are reiterated in Ephesians as major metaphors to reveal the apostle's idea of the relation between Christ and the church.

IV. Conclusion

The influence on the form of Pauline epistles are multiple instead of a specific one. Both Greco-Roman rhetorical style and Hebrew rhetorical techniques affect Paul's letters in one way or the other. Bown analyzed the form of Ephesians and indicated that the pattern of the

⁶⁶ Some biblical scholars indicated that the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles is the main thought presented in the whole letter of Ephesians. See Raymond E. Brown, pp. 623-626; Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, pp. 384-385; Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writing* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977). p. 329.

⁶⁷ KJB, p. 1675.

⁶⁸ RV, p. 863.

⁶⁹ Roland Meynet, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, p. 173.

letter is similar to that of Greco-Roman form.⁷⁰ Similarly, Achtemeier and others pointed out that the frame of Ephesians, the opening of the epistle, “resembles the normal Hellenistic letter opening.”⁷¹

However, as Meynet pointed out that Hebrew rhetorical techniques had great influence on the New Testament. He made some examples from the Four Gospels as well as from some of the epistles.⁷² Lowth also revealed that the New Testament obeys the organizational laws as those of the Hebrew Bible.⁷³ Roland further analyzed the probable reason of the Hebrew rhetorical influence on the writers of the New Testament: “Although they were written directly in Greek, those of the New Testament, they, too, were written by Jews....However, their authors essentially followed the ways of writing of the cultural environments in which they were educated and of the literature with which they were nourished.”⁷⁴

From the above comments and the previous analyses shown in the rest part of this study, it can be concluded that the frame of the epistolary form of Roman-Greco rhetoric can be discovered in Ephesians while the rhetorical techniques of the letter can be found in the content of the epistle. Unlike the rhetorical skills of Greco-Roman, in which obvious connectors are applied to connect the clauses, the clauses used in the two lengthy, complex sentences (2: 3-14 and 2: 15-23) composed of the whole Chapter one of Ephesians are arranged in an involutive way that the context is developed around a focal point or a center and the content related to the focal point is reiterated in a parallel form. These rhetorical skills are employed to present the reality the writer wants the recipients to comprehend. Paul manifested the reality regarding all the spiritual blessings revealed in the first chapter of Ephesians by using the concentrical arrangement and parallel dispositions instead of demonstrating the reality concerning the spiritual blessings. In other words, the significant texts are reiterated in different parts of the whole sentence through these kinds of rhetoric. In addition, the reiteration and contrast presented in parallel or binary disposition in the context of the letter highlights the ideas the apostle tried to convey. The effect of contrast and

⁷⁰ Raymond E. Brown, pp. 601-602.

⁷¹ Paul J. Achtemeier and et al, p. 381.

⁷² Meynet made many examples from the Books of Mark and Luke and from the Letter to Romans. See *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, pp. 169-178.

⁷³ Robert Lowth, p. 35-37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 7.

emphasis can also be achieved through the reiteration presented in parallel disposition and the contrast revealed in paratactic way. Consequently, the main idea of the passage can be revealed through such a rhetorical way as well.

The content of Ephesians is very distinctive from that of traditional Hellenistic letters because of the revelation to Christians and its related innovation of theological thought different from both traditional theology of Romans and Jews. Nevertheless, the form and rhetorical techniques employed in the letter still follow the path of Hebrew rhetoric. This reveals that the content of the epistle not only resembles the condition: “put new wine into old bottles,”⁷⁵ but also suggests the fundamental difference between Greek rhetoric and Jewish rhetoric: “It [Hebrew rhetoric] describes reality, leaving the reader to conclude. The Jew shows; the Greek wants to demonstrate. The Greek seeks to lead his reader to the bottom of his thoughts, while the Jew shows the way and encourages him to follow it.”⁷⁶ This might be what Paul did in Ephesians: to describe reality and exhort his readers to follow it. In other words, Paul’s purpose in Ephesians is not to demonstrate God’s spiritual blessings, but to reveal them by his depiction. In this aspect, the Hebrew rhetorical techniques used in the letter corresponds to the writer’s purpose.

⁷⁵ Matthew 9: 17, KJB, p. 1353.

⁷⁶ Roland, *An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, p. 173.

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《以弗所書》結構的修辭分析研究

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摘要

雖然有許多聖經研究解釋《以弗所書》的內容，但很少有人專注於分析信中結構。尤其是在修辭分析方面，修辭分析是對任何形式著作內容進行文學研究，探索作者的目的，通過這種分析方法了解保羅的目的。他的寫作技巧以及這些技術的可行性，而這些技術根據《以弗所書》的書信結構進行分析研究。討論以《以弗所書》的內文及其相關細節，可以發現或確定作者的目的以及支持論文的相關細節。透過書信結構的分析有助於我們理解寫作的構成，從而發現在信件的每個段落所呈現主要思想的修辭模式。不同段落中主要思想的連貫性，以便確定整封書信的主題。最後，在信的論點明顯之後，就可以理解作者的目的了。保羅在他的信中應用的技巧也將在本文中探討，因為它們提供了必要的工具來分析不同段落不同內容之間的關係。這些技術大多是從句法結構和修辭形式來討論，這有助於實現作者的目的和信的可行性。從這樣分析方法來看，本文可能會提出以弗所書與以往聖經研究不同的觀點，可能會從語言分析的角度發現這封信的論點。

關鍵詞：希伯來語修辭、希臘、羅馬修辭、句法結構、同義詞與反義平形體、二元式與意合式