

A B I B L E S T U D Y

An introduction to key concepts about honor and shame in the Bible

Nine lessons for individuals and small groups *in the dynamics of* ***Honor & Shame***



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1 Bible study

Ascribed or achieved honor

There are two sources of honor: ascribed and achieved.

ASCRIBED HONOR refers to the granting of respect given to a person based upon family, kinship, name, title, government, politics. It is honor derived from social institutions. **ACHIEVED HONOR** refers to the granting of respect based on accomplishment, competition, warfare, aggression, envy, athletic competition, or social games of push-and-shove—"challenge and riposte."

(Source: Neyrey, p. 15)

Task: Put a circle around the words which affirm the **ascribed honor** of Jesus Christ and a rectangular box around those words referring to His **achieved honor**.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 1

[1:1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

[5] For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"?

Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

[6] And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

[7] Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire."

[8] But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

[9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

[10] And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands;

[11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment,

[12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed.

But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

[13] And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

[14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?



Summary: What is the main thing you've learned from this exercise?

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2 Bible study

Challenge and riposte

One key feature of the honor/shame society—especially in the Mediterranean and Middle East region is “challenge and riposte”—also called the “game of push-and-shove.” This contributes mightily to the prevalence of conflict.

“Riposte” is a term used in the sport of fencing, meaning—“a quick return thrust following a parry.” Socially it means, “a quick clever reply to an insult or criticism.”

There are four steps to this protocol or social code of challenge and riposte, which may be observed in the passage below left.

(Source: Neyrey, p. 20)

Task: Identify each step of the four steps to “Challenge & Riposte” in the verses below. Then draw a line from each of the four steps—to the location in the verses where the step may be observed.

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

11 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”

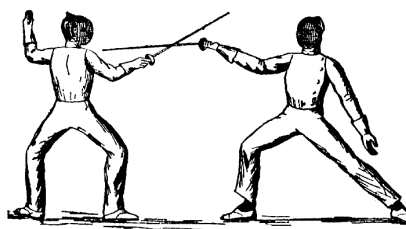
13 And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

14 But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

15 Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?”

16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”

17 As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.



Four steps to “Challenge & Riposte”

1. Claim of worth, value, honor or power
2. Challenge to that claim or refusal to acknowledge the claim
3. Riposte or defense of the claim
4. Public verdict of success awarded to either claimant or challenger

Most of Jesus’ miracles as well as his interactions with the Jewish leaders were in public. In a sense, he was constantly “on stage.” One scholar describes the “honor-shame game” in the Middle East as the “**ubiquitous game of challenge and riposte.**”

Definition: “**ubiquitous**” means “present, appearing, or found everywhere.”

What does this tell us about the many interactions in public in the gospels—between Jesus and the Jewish leaders?

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—Luke 13:10-17 ESV



Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?

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3 Bible study

Image of limited good

Another feature of honor / shame societies is the ‘image of limited good.’ This is “the belief that everything in the social, economic, natural universe ... everything desired in life: land, wealth, respect and status, power and influence ... exist in finite quantity and are in short supply.” If you gain, I lose ... it’s a “zero-sum game.”

(Source: Neyrey, p. 18)

Task: Read the two passages of Scripture below. Discuss and answer the questions for each passage.

- 6 As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.
- 7 And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,
“Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”
- 8 And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?”
- 9 And Saul eyed David from that day on.

—1 Samuel 18:6–9 ESV

What are the dynamics of ascribed honor and achieved honor in this passage?

For King Saul:

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For David:

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How does this passage reveal the “image of limited good”?

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- 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.
Yes, and I will rejoice,
- 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,
- 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.
- 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
- 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.
- 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

—Philippians 1:18-23 ESV

Paul is a Roman citizen—a *great honor*. But he is in prison—a *great shame*—as he writes this letter. What do you observe in the passage above which indicates that Paul is keenly aware of his shameful situation?

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How does Paul’s relationship with Jesus Christ give him the means to overturn “the image of limited good” ... turning “win-lose” into “win-win.”

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Why is this so *radical*?

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Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?

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4 Bible study

Body language

In the world of the Roman Empire the most honorable parts of the body were considered to be the head, face and hands. One of the most shameful body parts was considered to be the feet.

Task: Observe below—Psalm 8:6 and Psalm 110:1.



How is **honor** expressed in Psalm 8:6?

In Psalm 110:1?

How is **shame** expressed in Psalm 8:6?

In Psalm 110:1?

“You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” –Psalm 8:6 ESV

Task: Circle the words in the verse below which are quoted from Psalm 8:6.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet...” (1 Cor 15:25-27 ESV)

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23 ESV)

putting everything in subjection under his feet.” ... At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor ... (Heb 2:8–9 ESV)

“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” –Psalm 110:1 ESV

Task: From each verse below, write what is quoted from Psalm 110:1.

Matthew 22:43–44

Matthew 26:64

Mark 12:36

Mark 16:19

Luke 20:41–44

Luke 22:69

Acts 2:33–34

Acts 7:55-56

Romans 8:34

Ephesians 1:20

Colossians 3:1

Hebrews 1:3

1:13

8:1

12:2

1 Peter 3:22



Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?

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5 Bible study

The concept of “face”

Scripture shows that whereas shame results in turning away from the face of God, our redemption and healing from shame comes when we are given peace before the face of God.*

*Adapted from Robin Stockitt: *Restoring the Shamed: Towards a Theology of Shame* (Kindle Locations 2679-2681).



Task: Observe the passage below—Genesis 4:4–16 (ESV)—and underline the references to “face”.

[4] and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

[5] but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

[6] The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?

[7] If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

[8] Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

[9] Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

[10] And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.

[11] And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

[12] When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

[13] Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.

[14] Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

[15] Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

[16] Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Task: For each verse below, write the main idea about “face” in your own words.

Num 4:24–26 _____

Ps 34:5 _____

Ps 67:1 _____

Ps 80:3 _____

2 Cor 3:18 _____

2 Cor 4:6 _____



Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?

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6 Bible study

Honor-status reversal

Honor-status reversal is what happens when a person, family or people have their honor status reversed. Two types:

1) End result is honor: Honor-to-shame-to-honor, or simply, shame-to-honor.

2) End result is shame: Shame-to-honor-to-shame, or simply, honor-to-shame.



Task: Observe below—*Philippians 2:5–11* and in the rectangular space below, **create a diagram** with labels reflecting the honor-status reversal of Jesus Christ: his pre-incarnate glory, his incarnation and humiliating death by crucifixion, followed by resurrection and resurrection and exaltation.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:5-11 ESV)

Diagram goes in this space

Task: Observe the honor-status reversal dynamics in the following passages, and discuss what you find.

Ephesians chapter 2

Revelation 3:14–22

Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?



MARK 10:32–45 (ESV)

Task: Read the passage at right—and identify the honor/shame dynamics.

Identify the dynamics based on the list below. All but two are in the passage.

- ascribed or achieved honor
- body parts
- honor claims
- love of honor
- honor competition
- image of limited good
- challenge & riposte
- concept of “face”
- forms of shaming techniques

IMPORTANT: Identify the two examples of honor-status reversal.

What is at the core of honor-status reversal?

[32] And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, [33] saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

[34] And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

[35] And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” [36] And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” [37] And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” [38] Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” [39] And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, [40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” [41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. [42] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [43] But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”



Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?

8

Try it out!

Speak and pray about following Jesus Christ in the language of honor and shame.

Task: Choose one or more of the verses below, and use the Scriptural language of honor and shame to describe your relationship with Jesus Christ, and the honor of following Him. Take two to three minutes each.

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his **name**,
he gave the **right** [honor, authority] to become **children of God**
(John 1:12 ESV)*

*For I am not **ashamed** of the gospel,
for it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
(Romans 1:16 ESV)*

*because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is **Lord** and believe in your heart that
God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says,
“**Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.**”
(Romans 10:9-11 ESV)*

*“So the **honor** is for you who believe ...”
(1 Peter 2:7 ESV)*

*But you are a **chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation**, a people for his own possession,
that you may **proclaim the excellencies** of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous
light. Once you were not a people, **but now you are God's people**;
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
(1 Peter 2:9-10 ESV)*

Summary: What is the main thing you’ve learned from this learning task?



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Your personal summary

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Your prayer of commitment:

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Addendum

The book *Shame and Guilt*, by social scientists June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing provides compelling insights which relate to Christian ministry, including global missions.

Here's a summary. Below is a quote from *Shame and Guilt*, page 25:

Features shared by shame and guilt

- Both fall into the class of “moral” emotions
- Both are “self-conscious”, self-referential emotions
- Both are negatively valenced emotions
- Both involve internal attributions of one sort or another
- Both are typically experienced in interpersonal conflicts
- The negative events that give rise to shame and guilt are highly similar (frequently involving moral failures or transgressions).

Key dimensions on which shame and guilt differ

	Shame	Guilt
Focus of evaluation	Global self: “ <i>I</i> did that horrible thing”	Specific behavior: “I <i>did</i> that horrible <i>thing</i> ”
Degree of distress	Generally more painful than guilt	Generally less painful than shame
Phenomenological experience	Shrinking, feeling small, feeling worthless, powerless	Tension, remorse, regret
Operation of “self”	Self “split” into observing and observed “selves”	Unified self intact
Impact on “self”	Self impaired by global devaluation	Self unimpaired by global devaluation
Concern vis-à-vis the “other”	Concern for others’ evaluation of self	Concern with one’s effect on others
Counterfactual processes	Mentally undoing some aspect of self	Mentally undoing some aspect of behavior
Motivational features	Desire to hide, escape, or strike back	Desire to confess, apologize, or repair

Here is a beginning reflection on the implications for Christian ministry:

Shame tells us: “I did that horrible thing”, whereas guilt tells us: “I did that horrible thing.”

Simply stated, shame is about *who I am*; guilt is about *what I’ve done*. It follows, as stated above, that shame is generally more painful than guilt.

Could it be that the cure for guilt is not nearly as urgent and transformative as the cure for shame? Could it be, that when we teach God's Word with a focus on guilt—while ignoring the pathology of shame common to all of humanity, that we are, by default, withholding that which most deeply heals the human soul?

The data presented by Tangney and Dearing indicate that shame has far more pathological (negative and sick) effects on people than does guilt. Their research found that shame motivates people to “hide, escape, or strike back”. In striking contrast, guilt motivates people to “confess, apologize, or repair.” This research has been affirmed over and over again for more than 40 years.

Simply stated, *shame* is more likely to lead to *hurtful* behavior, whereas *guilt* is more likely to lead to *healing* behavior.

Could it be that when we present the gospel of Jesus Christ solely as the cure for our guilt—and ignore the biblically-based truths and principles which address the problem of our shame—we are not just truncating the gospel, we are withholding the most crucial truths necessary for the transformation of the people of God?

Many mission and culture leaders recognize that Majority-World peoples have as their pivotal cultural value—*honor and shame*. Could it be that when Christians present the gospel of Christ to Majority-World peoples in a way that only addresses humanity's guilt before God, that resistance to the message of Christ's Gospel may actually appropriate?

“Appropriate resistance to the Gospel”? I know that sounds weird. But consider what it would be to have as your constant, every-day drama—the avoidance of, or cure for shame, along with the pursuit of honor. This is your very life and identity. Your life is moving in a deep, powerful river whose current is honor and shame.

Would not people living and moving in this river of honor and shame inherently know some things? Wouldn't they instinctively *get it*—that the supposed Good News which only solves the problem of *guilt*—is not really deep enough, powerful enough, *good enough*—to rescue them from the deepest danger of their heart—that being the anxiety of shame?

Contrast this with the Good News which also solves the problem of shame! Imagine if the Atonement of Jesus Christ was not only presented as the solution to the problem of guilt, but also as—the covering of our shame and the restoration of our honor before God. [See Luke 15:11–32](#). Wouldn't this be more attractive? Wouldn't this more likely be a treasure worth dying for?

Presenting the gospel of Christ in such a way that the message includes both the removal of our guilt and the covering of our shame is especially wise—when sharing with people whose pivotal cultural value is honor and shame.

The above article was written September 9, 2012 and may be found at Werner Mischke's blog:
<http://tiny.cc/4c1hrw>

For further reading on honor and shame:

- **David A. deSilva: *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*** (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000)
The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation (The Liturgical Press: 1999)
- **Werner Mischke: “Honor and Shame in Cross-Cultural Relationships”** — free download available at <http://beautyofpartnership.org/about/free>
- **Roland Muller: *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door***
- **Jerome H. Neyrey: *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*** (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1998).
- **David Pryce-Jones: *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*** (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989, 2009)
- **E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien: *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*** (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2012)
- **June Tangney and Ronda Dearing: *Shame and Guilt*** (New York: Guilford Press, 2002)
- **Lewis Smedes: *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve*** (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993)
- **Robin Stockitt: *Restoring the Shamed: Towards a Theology of Shame*** (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012)
- **Timothy C. Tennent: *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). Especially chapter 4: “Anthropology: Human Identity in Shame-Based Cultures of the Far East”.

For a list of free resources to learn more about honor and shame, visit:

wernermischke.org/resources

If you would like Werner to be involved in training your group or mission team in the dynamics of honor and shame, please contact the Mission ONE office.

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Mission training resources:

- Small group DVD curriculum introducing world missions:
<http://operationworldview.org>
- Gain the skills for building cross-cultural partnerships:
<http://beautyofpartnership.org>
- Share the Gospel in the language of honor and shame:
<http://thefatherslovebooklet.org>

