

Volume 4, Number 1, 2015

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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

**Honor and
Shame
and Oral
Preference
Learners**

**Mischke • Wilson • McFarland • Doll • Hall • Trinh
Patrick • Kabete**

THE 3D GOSPEL

MINISTRY IN GUILT, SHAME, AND FEAR CULTURES



Jayson Georges



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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Volume 4, Number 1, 2015

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Cover Photo

A royal knight of chivalry kneels in prayer in a chapel of the Tower of London. The Tower is one of the residences of the British monarchy – it was founded in 1066 and houses the crown jewels. This whole complex has witnessed the Bohemian Reformation of the 14th century, the Gutenberg Press revolution of the 15th century, the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the English Reformation of the 16th century; now, silently it is witnessing the digital revolution of the 21st century.

Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced.
Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know
I will not be put to shame.

Isaiah 50:7

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and
be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify
many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality
with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature² of a servant, being made in human
likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled
himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him
the name that is above every name, 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

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement is welcomed.

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Editorial Email: oralityjournal@gmail.com

Website: www.oralty.net

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Editor's Note

Samuel E. Chiang

In Sync with the Majority Worldview: Honor and Shame

Our discussions on the “gospel” were lively. The participants at the Houston Baptist University consultation on orality and theological education were fully engaged; this included chancellors, presidents, provosts, academic deans, professors and practitioners. The issue was not the incorrectness of the gospel, but the incompleteness of the gospel presented from a Western evangelical viewpoint. In our modern, reductionist approach to speaking about the gospel, we often neglect the biblical worldview that is included in the Scripture, that of honor and shame.

Ever since the printing press revolution, the reading and understanding of Scripture has helped the spiritual growth of the individual, the understanding of doctrine, and the anchoring of theological moorings. However, in the process we have also privatized our faith; as some would describe it, we have become little popes interpreting the Scripture and expediently transmitting the gospel as we see fit. Often times, I have been reminded on this orality journey, that one of the central objectives is to make available the full counsel of the Word of God to all peoples. Contrary to popular association, orality is not merely storytelling. It is a broad discipline that provides the Church with potential tools from different communication paradigms which can be used so that people of different communication backgrounds can engage the whole Word of God.

Somewhere along the way the Church in the West got side-tracked. We did not teach every book of the Bible. We started to reduce what was to be taught. Combining this trend with the fact that people are engaging with Scripture less robustly, we teach only portions of Scripture—usually the New Testament—often skewed towards certain genre. I was speaking recently with a NT professor who teaches at a famous evangelical university. The professor was lamenting the trend in his NT Survey course: the students cannot even read through the entire New Testament. As a result, the professor was assigning only the book of Luke (not even Luke -- Acts) to be read as a course textbook; the shocking reality is that the students are not even able to finish the book of Luke!

Scripture engagement needs attention, but also understanding of the Scriptural worldview that includes “honor and shame.” The West and the Church in the West are facing the acceleration of societies embracing “honor and shame” so much so that *Christianity Today* devoted major coverage to the topic of “honor and shame” in its 2015 March issue. Incidentally it quoted three of the participant-authors who were at the Houston Baptist University Orality Consultation. (Note their newest books are shown on the inside, outside, and back cover of this issue of the Journal.)

In the West, our literature, reflections, and theological approaches to “honor and shame” have been negligent. On the other hand, the rest of the world, the global south-east, the Majority Church continually to function within an “honor-shame” worldview. A treasury of riches awaits discovery and exploration by the Church. In this publication we intend to invite the richness from the Majority World to speak into this matter so that we can all appreciate better the “fullness” of the gospel.

In this issue, we are well-served by Werner Mischke, who provides an overview of biblical passages covering honor-shame and its implications to oral preference learners. Michael Wilson and Joe Handley disclose from the leadership lab what is succeeding in a highly literate Japan working with a predominantly oral culture. We are grateful to Andrew McFarland for tracing William Carey’s challenges with communication and how he came to embrace oral preference learners. Margaret Doll helps us to look at how the integration of literacy and orality can really work and how important it is to recover orality within the culture so as to be effective. Veteran orality practitioner Annette Hall discusses overcoming the temptations to “over-teach and explain,” which can often short circuit the learning experience for oral preference learners. Paul Trinh’s blog updates us to his own journey in orality and we are grateful to both Susangeline Y. Patrick and Irene Maonei Kabete for their book reviews.

I am personally delighted that Geoffrey W. Hahn has joined the Editorial Committee and that William Coppedge is agreeing to serve as Associate Editor.

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Hong Kong, SAR, China

Honor-Status Reversal—Dominant Motif of the Biblical Grand Narrative

Werner Mischke

Werner Mischke is Executive Vice President and Director of Training Ministries for Mission ONE. His new book is The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World. The book examines the values of honor and shame in scripture and how honor/shame dynamics can help us contextualize the gospel.

Introduction

The pivotal cultural value of the Bible's ancient peoples is honor/shame (Malina 1993; Neyrey 1998; deSilva 2000), but this is largely unrecognized in Western theology and thus represents a blind spot for Christians trained in the Western theological tradition (Mischke 2015, 45–61, Tennent 2007, 77–101; Wu 2012, 52–53).

As this blind spot is removed from the reader's eyes and the scripture is read in the light of honor/shame, a dominant motif of the Bible's grand narrative emerges; that motif is *honor-status reversal*. This motif is observable in nearly all of the 66 books of the Bible; moreover, many of the Bible's well-known stories are saturated with it.

This article comprises two parts. Part one provides for *definition and examples of honor-status reversal*. We will illustrate a multitude of cases from scripture to discover that honor-status reversal is literally hidden in plain sight—and is thus prevalent enough to be considered a *dominant motif*. Part two explores *honor-status reversal as a central feature of the gospel*. We will examine four iconic words that embody honor-status reversal for the gospel—*Cross, Story, Mission, and Kingdom*.

When honor-status reversal is recognized as a dominant motif of the Bible, one soon realizes that there are significant implications for the practice of orality. This article concludes by posing three areas of inquiry: 1) reframing the gospel, 2) resonating with the unreached, and 3) reversing honor in practice.

Part 1: Definition and Examples of Honor-status Reversal in the Bible

Defining Honor-status Reversal

Honor-status reversal is when a person, family, or people have whatever degree of esteem, respect, privilege, power, or authority before a community turned the other way around. One’s honor-status can be high or low or in-between, ranging from the lowest honor-status of a leper or a slave—to the immensely powerful high honor-status of a mighty king.

For this study, we classify honor-status reversal according to the end result:

- (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.

These variations may be expressed graphically as shown below:

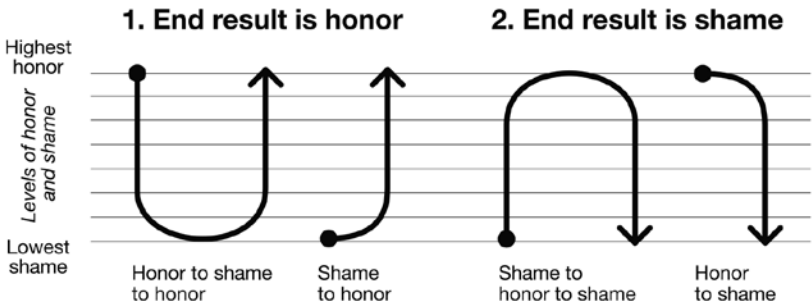


Figure 1: Types of honor-status reversal

Examples in Scripture

The preeminent example of honor-status reversal in scripture is found in Paul’s description of our Lord Jesus Christ in Philippians 2 (depicted in Figure 2):¹

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in

The Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ

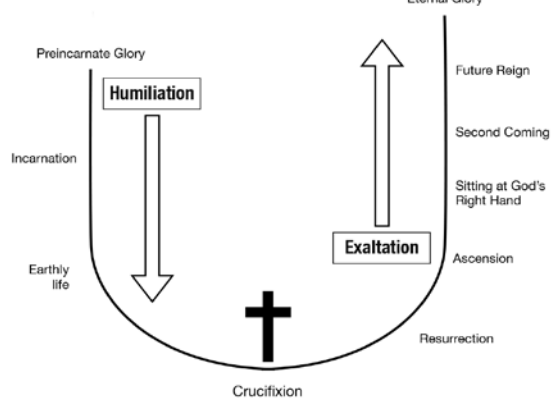


Figure 2: Humiliation and exaltation of Christ as honor-status reversal

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 (Phil 2:5–11).

Jesus Christ was with the Father in the honor and glory of heaven in eternity past. His honor-status was infinitely high. Christ was in his “pre-incarnate glory.”

But Jesus willingly allowed for his honor-status to be reversed. He “emptied himself,” descending through the incarnation, born fully human to the virgin Mary ... “taking the form of a servant.”

He humbled himself further by dying, “even death on a cross”—the most shameful and ignominious destiny a man could endure.²

Christ’s entire Passion experience was his humiliation.

Moreover, Jesus’ crucifixion-as-destiny on earth was not the end of the story. The pre-incarnate glory and honor he once had in heaven,

Jesus’ crucifixion-as-destiny on earth was not the end of the story.

then willingly laid aside, was to be regained and then magnified as he rose from the dead and sat down at the right

hand of the Father. The honor and glory of Christ was vindicated! Again, this is an example of honor-status reversal—also known as Christ’s exaltation.

Here is another example of honor-status reversal from the words of Jesus:

“Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great” (Luke 9:48).

Karl Reich explains honor-status reversal this way:

The very words “least” and “greatest” would automatically call up the thought of the Greco-Roman honor/shame system which was ultimately concerned with greatness. Malina and

Rohr argue that this verse cuts at the very heart of the honor/shame system. They write, “A squabble over honor-status would be typical within any ancient Mediterranean grouping . . . Jesus’ reversal of the expected order challenges the usual assumptions about what is honorable in a very fundamental way” (Reich, 2011, 156).

Referring to this verse, “And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30), Reich continues:

... The pithy comment stays with the audience because of its compact and forceful nature and its enigmatic message. The transformation of polar opposites into their antithesis is unthinkable. The saying of the Lukan Jesus undermines the honor/shame system by proclaiming a reversal of roles (Ibid.).

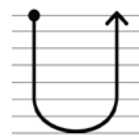
We have observed the dynamic of honor-status reversal in Paul’s description of Christ’s incarnation in his letter to the Philippians. We have seen it briefly in one passage in Luke’s Gospel. But it must be noted that honor-status reversal is present throughout scripture.

(Otherwise, of course, it cannot be considered a motif.) Consider:



Adam and Eve are “sent... out from the garden of Eden” (Gen. 3:23); they leave the glory and honor

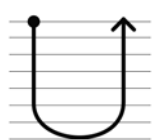
of perfect fellowship with God and are shamed by their rebellion (Gen. 3:10–11) to live apart from the honorable presence of God. The honor of their fellowship with God is reversed to a condition of being a permanent outsider—with shame, guilt, and fear.



Abraham: The story of Abraham is a story of a wealthy man who is called by God to essentially

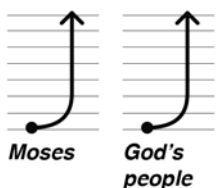
abandon his identity, to leave the very source of his honor—his father, his kinship, his homeland: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). But consider the immense honor he is promised by God: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 2–3). Christopher

Wright says of God's promise in the call of Abraham: "The word of God that spoke into darkness now speaks into barrenness with good news of astonishing reversal, holding before our imaginations vistas of a future that is (almost) beyond belief. God's mission of world redemption begins" (Wright, 2006, 200; emphasis mine). It is an honor-status reversal foundational to the entire narrative and revelation of scripture—including the global mission of God.



Joseph: The story of Joseph takes up a large portion of scripture (Gen. 37–50): fully 14

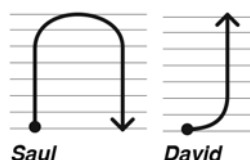
chapters. Joseph is the favorite, most-honored son of Jacob, but his brothers throw him down into a pit to be sold into slavery—a deep shame—from which he eventually rises to become the prime minister of Egypt. It is a classic story of honor-status reversal.



Moses and the Exodus: The story of Moses in Exodus is also an account

of honor-status reversal. A baby born into the oppressed minority society of the Hebrews is found

by pharaoh's daughter—and then raised as a prince in the royal palace. Eventually, in a dramatic God-empowered salvation event of epic proportions, Moses leads the oppressed Hebrews in the Exodus out of the shame of slavery in Egypt toward the honor of the Promised Land (Exod. 6:6–8). The reversal of shame to honor for all God's people is also depicted in Leviticus: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect" (Lev. 26:13). After many generations of oppression, God rescues them. He makes them "walk erect"—their dignity recovered, their honor restored.



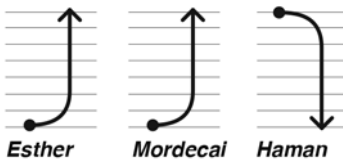
Saul and David: The story of Saul is one of low

status to kingly honor—back to low status and shame (1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22; 15:17). On the other hand, God takes David, a lowly shepherd boy who has faith in the living God, and raises him to become a mighty king whose honor in the eyes of the people permanently exceed that of the prior king (1 Sam. 18:7). The contrast between Saul and David in their honor-status-trajectory is

summarized in 1 Samuel: “There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker” (2 Sam. 3:1). God honors David even to promising an eternal kingdom to his son (2 Sam. 7:11–13), and many see Jesus as this son.³

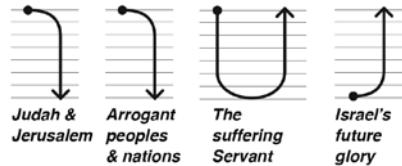


Mephibosheth: A dramatic story of honor-status reversal is recorded in 2 Sam. 9. King David inquires to find if there was “anyone left of the house of Saul” in order to “show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake” (2 Sam 9:1). One shameful survivor was found—Mephibosheth—“who is crippled in his feet” (v. 3). With great kindness, David instructs that all of Saul’s family land be returned to Mephibosheth, and that Mephibosheth eat at the king’s table (v. 7). What a reversal—from the shame of disability and obscurity to eating every day with the king!



Esther: The story of Esther is another classic. A beautiful

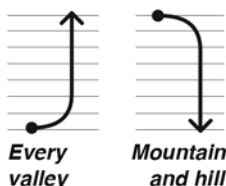
woman (Esther) from the minority culture of the Jews ends up rising in honor as she is chosen to be the wife, the very queen, of the king of Persia. When a plot to kill the Jews is hatched by the evil Haman, Esther’s uncle Mordecai asks Esther to courageously intervene with the king on behalf of her people, the Jews. The *ESV Study Bible* says, “The reader is clearly meant to laugh at the way [Haman’s] vanity traps him into having to publicly honor the very man he intended to kill (6:6–11), and his death on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:8–10) is a classic case of a villain falling into his own pit.”⁴ We see here, again, various examples of honor-status reversal!



Isaiah: The book of Isaiah is saturated with the dynamic of honor-status reversal. I will mention just a few examples. Judah and Jerusalem are to be judged, disgraced, and shamed for their rebellion against God (Isa. 1:1–8:22). The nations surrounding Judah and Israel are to be likewise judged and shamed because of their arrogance; a variety of

oracles are spoken against them (10–23, 34). In chapter 23, the whole earth undergoes an honor-status reversal, being judged by God for rebellion.

Perhaps the most elegant and poetic example of honor-



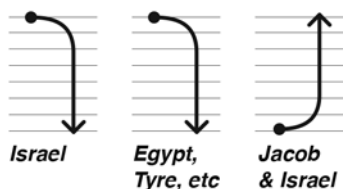
status reversal is in chapter 40: “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (40:4–5).

Chapters 52–54 describe the honor-status reversal of the suffering servant. Chapter 52 has status reversals ending in both shame and honor. Chapter 53 deals exclusively with the shame of the Servant who is “pierced for our transgressions . . . crushed for our iniquities” (53:5), “because he poured out his soul to death” (v. 12). Chapter 54 deals exclusively with the upward status reversal of God’s servant and the surprising, joy-filled honor to come: “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who

**“pierced for our transgressions
... crushed for our iniquities”**

have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,’ says the Lord” (54:1).

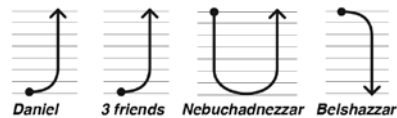
Finally, chapters 60–66 describe various ways that (following God’s judgment in 63:1–19), Israel and even all the nations (66:18–20) will experience a dramatic honor-status reversal through worshiping the one true and living God. This honor in God for all of his people will finally end in shalom in “the new heavens and the new earth” (66:10–17, 22).⁵



Ezekiel: The book of Ezekiel has numerous examples of honor-status reversal. For example, Israel is brought low by God for her idolatries and immorality in chapters 5–6, and 20–24. This dynamic of bringing Israel down into shame is seen in these verses: “Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. You shall be a reproach

and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the Lord; I have spoken” (Ezek. 5:14–15). God uses the nations to judge Israel, but God also brings down those same prideful nations—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt (chap. 25–32)—for their arrogance against God.

The comprehensive theme of honor-status reversal—bringing down the proud while elevating the humble—may be seen in chapter 17. “And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it” (17:24). The restoration of Israel’s honor from a place of degradation and shame is wonderfully represented in chapters 36–37, especially in the passage about the “dry bones” that are raised up from graves to become “an exceedingly great army” (37:1–14). God promised that he will “restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel” so that “they shall forget their shame” (39:25–26).



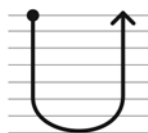
Daniel: The book of Daniel has a high concentration of stories that contain the dynamic of honor-status reversal. Repeatedly, Daniel and his friends are challenged in their faith, keep their commitment to trust in God, descend into a severe trial, only to rise in vindication and honor. In chapter 1, they are vindicated and promoted for their refusal to compromise their cultural identity as people of the Most High God. In chapter 2, Daniel publicly praises God as the one who “reveals deep and hidden things” (v. 22). Subsequently, Daniel reveals not just what King Nebuchadnezzar has dreamt, but also the dream’s profound meaning (vv. 31–45); as a result Daniel is highly honored and promoted to the position of “ruler over the whole province of Babylon” (v. 48).

In chapter 3, Daniel’s three friends refuse to worship the huge golden image set up by the king, are thrown into the fiery furnace made seven times hotter than usual, and they survive without their hair being singed. God is literally with them in the fiery trial as “the fourth [who] is like the son of the gods” (v. 25). Again God’s people are vindicated and experienced a rise in their honor-status (vv. 29–30).

Chapter 4 reveals the honor-status reversal of King Nebuchadnezzar himself. Because of the king's sin (v. 27) and pride (vv. 28–30), God sovereignly removes him from his throne. Nebuchadnezzar is humiliated as he apparently loses his mind and becomes like an ox, eating grass, ugly and unkempt, isolated in shame (v. 33). Then, Nebuchadnezzar says, “My reason has returned to me” (v. 34), and he gives eloquent praise to the Most High (vv. 34–35). It is a dramatic example of honor-status reversal for Nebuchadnezzar: “And for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me” (v. 36).

In chapter 5, King Belshazzar throws a party using the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem—and in so doing, dramatically dishonors God (vv. 1–4, 23). A mysterious hand appears and writes a message on the banquet wall, causing intense fear and dread (vv. 5–6). Daniel is called in to interpret the message from God (vv. 10–28): it is the doom and imminent fall of Belshazzar. The prideful king is killed that same night by the invading army of Darius the Mede (vv. 30–31). It is another classic example of honor-status reversal

under the sovereign rule of the Most High God.



The Beatitudes
(Matt. 5:3–11)
begin with:
“Blessed are the

poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In every verse in this most beautiful

series, Jesus is teaching that in his kingdom there is a

**“My reason has returned to me,”
and he gave eloquent praise to the
Most High.**

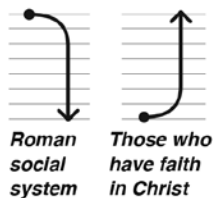
new way of living, a new way of gaining and measuring the honor of a man or woman. This new way of living is not a dismissal of the need for honor—or a total rejection of the honor/shame values that permeated Greco-Roman culture. It is, rather, a proclamation that a new honor, a higher and permanent honor, is now available to all as they live in God's kingdom in loving submission to the most honorable King of kings.



**The Parable of
the Prodigal Son**
(Luke 15:11–32)
is considered the
best short story

ever told (Macarthur, 2008, p. 3). The younger of two sons has turned away from his family and

his father. Entering a downward spiral of shame, he ends up in the most degrading condition conceivable—in a famine, feeding swine, wishing to eat what the pigs eat. He comes to his senses and decides to return home to his father, and rather than being rejected and scorned, the father greets him with kisses and weeping. He gives the lost son his prized robe. He provides sandals for his feet and gives him a ring for his finger, signifying the honor and authority of the family. Then the father calls for a huge village celebration to welcome home the lost son. Is there a more powerful parable of honor- status reversal in scripture?



R o m a n s :
Robert Jewett
e x p l a i n s
that Roman
emperors were
worshiped as

gods by the people of the Roman Empire. For example, concerning Caesar Augustus:

The imperial cult celebrated “the gospel” of the allegedly divine power of the emperor, viewing him, in the words of an official document from the province of Asia, as a savior . . . who put

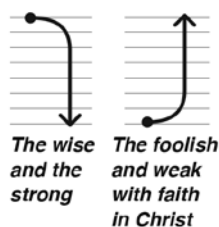
an end to war and will restore order everywhere: Caesar, by his appearance has realized the hopes of our ancestors; not only has he surpassed earlier benefactors of humanity, but he leaves no hope to those of the future that they might surpass him. The god’s birthday was for the world the beginning of the gospel that he brought (Jewett, 2007, 138).

Moreover, Nero was lauded as “the saviour and benefactor of the universe” (Ibid., 139). In his commentary on Romans 1:16, Jewett asserts:

The contrast with Roman civic [religion] brings more clearly into focus the implications of Paul’s thesis and its correlation with the rest of the exordium as well as the subsequent argument of his letter, because this gospel shatters the unrighteous precedence given to the strong over the weak, the free and well-educated over slaves and the ill-educated, the Greeks and Romans over the barbarians. If what the world considers dishonorable has power

[Jewett is referring to the gospel of the cross], it will prevail and achieve a new form of honor to those who have not earned it, an honor consistent with divine righteousness. All who place their faith in this gospel will be set right, that is, be placed in the right relation to the most significant arena in which honor is dispensed: divine judgment. Thus the triumph of divine righteousness through the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is achieved by transforming the system in which shame and honor are dispensed. The thesis of Romans therefore effectively turns the social value system of the Roman empire upside down (Ibid., 138; emphasis mine).

Therefore, we assert that Paul's letter to the Romans is a theological treatise shaped in part by the social and cultural situation of the church in Rome—and incorporating at its core the dynamic of honor-status reversal.



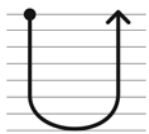
All who place their faith in this gospel will be set right...

1 Corinthians:
“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God

chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence

of God” (1 Cor. 1:27–29). Richard Bauckham asserts that “social status is the issue in much of Paul’s debates with the dominant faction in the

Corinthian church.” The wise are “the powerful elite, or those who aspire to join them. The strong are those whose wealth and social position give them power and influence in society, while the people Paul calls weak are the powerless, the ordinary people with no say and no muscle in this social world” (Bauckham, 2003, 50). Into this intensely status-conscious faith community, Paul proclaimed the foolishness of “Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (v. 23).

*Lamb of God*

Revelation: In God's revelation to John of the cosmic struggle between God's glorious kingdom

and the devil's empire of evil, God's final judgment on evil is revealed. Foundational to God's victory is the resounding conquest of the the Son of God who became the Lamb of God who was slain—and who has through resurrection become the fearless, triumphant Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:6–7). The honor-status reversal of Jesus Christ—from crucified Lamb to conquering Lion—could not be more clear. Also contained in Revelation is the honor-status reversal of mighty Babylon.

And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast" (Rev. 18:2).

*Babylon**The devil**Believers*

the saints who were martyred are honorably clothed in white... the once glorious, evil serpent, the devil, is finally vanquished...

Numerous other examples of honor-status reversal also appear in Revelation. In chapter 3, the saints at Laodicea are admonished by the Lord, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen" (v.18), and then a few verses later, in an almost unthinkable expression of elevated honor, the Lord Jesus says, "The one who conquers, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sit with my Father on his throne" (v. 21). In addition, the saints who were martyred are honorably clothed in white (6:11) . . . the once glorious, evil serpent, the devil, is finally vanquished (20:1–10) . . . even the once-inglorious unredeemed peoples of the earth—represented by their kings—bring their glory into the new city (21:22–26). This is but a sampling of the examples in Revelation of honor-status reversal.

Honor-status Reversal in Ephesians 2—Salvation by Grace through Faith

Ephesians 2:1–7 gives us a dramatic picture of honor-status reversal from being “dead in the trespasses and sins” to having been “raised . . . up with him and seated . . . with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” From death to seated with Christ in exalted honor. Astounding! Let’s take a closer look at the profound dynamics of honor-status reversal in Ephesians 2:1–7 (see Figure 3).

Honor-status reversal—Humanity in relation to God (Ephesians 2:1–7)	
VERTICAL DIMENSION (COSMIC)	
Our original shameful status in relation to God	Our honor-status reversal by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spiritually dead: “dead in . . . trespasses and sins” (2:1)• Unwittingly following the world’s spirit and devil: “following the course of this world”/ “following the prince of the power of the air” (2:2)• Victimized by evil spirit: “the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2)• DNA of an evil, shameful father: “sons of disobedience” (2:2)• Enslaved to self: “lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind” (2:3)• Destined for God’s eternal punishment: “children of wrath” (2:3)• Unexceptional: “like the rest of mankind” (2:3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loving intervention, undeserved, from the powerful, divine Benefactor directed toward us: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us” (2:4)• Gave us new life us by enjoining us to the Messiah-King: “made us alive together with Christ” (2:5)• Permanently raised our honor status in Christ’s resurrection: “and raised us up with him” (2:6)• Providing us rest and authority in relational co-regency with Christ the King: “seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6)• All to display God’s riches to magnify his honor for all eternity: “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (2:6)

Figure 3: *honor-status reversal in Ephesians 2:1–7*

The first seven verses in Ephesians 2 speak to all believers—Jew and Gentile—of humanity’s relationship with God, from spiritually dead to “made alive with Christ,” “raised with Christ,” and “seated with him.” This is the vertical dimension. It refers to our personal, positional, eternity-future in relationship to God.

Let us consider the last 12 verses of Ephesians 2 (see Figure 4).

Honor-status reversal—Gentiles in relation to God’s People (Ephesians 2:11–22)	
HORIZONTAL DIMENSION (SOCIAL / CULTURAL)	
Ephesians 2:11–12 Our original shameful status in relation to God’s people	Ephesians 2:13–22 Our honor-status reversal by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unclean, defiled and without hope of being made clean: “Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision” (2:11)• No access to the honor and benefaction of the Messiah King: “separated from Christ” (2:12)• As aliens in relation to God’s great people Israel: “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel” (2:12)• Unaware of any relational destiny in God: “strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:12)• Living in despair without God’s presence: “having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12)• Disconnected from the most honorable relationship: “far off” ... “strangers and aliens” (2:12)• On the other side of “the dividing wall of hostility” (2:12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From far away in shame to very near through the honor of Christ’s blood: “you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13)• Messiah King himself is our new source of honor—dispelling our compulsion for honor competition and hostility: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (2:14)• For a completely new kind of kinship group made in peace: “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace” (2:15)• The shame of Christ’s body on the cross absorbed humanity’s compulsion for honor competition and hostility—to create a new body among humanity—a community of peace: “and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (2:16)• Both Jew and Gentile (no superiority for being Jewish) were equally in need of the preaching of this grace and peace: “And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (2:17)• The high honor of access to Holy God is now available to all peoples—further dispelling honor competition: “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (2:18)• Shameful state as strange aliens replaced by multi-dimensional honor of citizens, saints, family members: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (2:19)• Entering into the honor of God’s ancient story, the crux of which is the Messiah King and Son of God: “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (2:20)• Brothers and sisters in Christ become the new “sacred space”—wherever they are: “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (2:21)• In Christ your new community is the dwelling for the most honorable, holy presence of God. “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:22)

Figure 4: Honor-status reversal in Ephesians 2:11–22

The last 12 verses of Ephesians 2 speak to Gentile believers and their relationship to God's chosen people. Paul describes it as a profound transformation—a reversal of shame to honor. From separated, alienated, strangers, having no hope—the “uncircumcision” (v. 11)—to citizens, saints, full-fledged family members who together are a dwelling for the presence of God. This is the horizontal dimension, the right-now, life-on-earth-with-my-neighbor dimension.

At the crux of two dimensions of honor-status reversal: “salvation by grace through faith.”

What is located between these two dramatic expressions of honor-status reversal—between verses 1–7 and 11–22? The often-quoted verses about salvation by grace through faith:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

status reversal. The vertical dimension refers to a person's relationship with God. The horizontal dimension refers to the Gentiles' relationship with God's people. The epic drama inherent in these dimensions of honor-status reversal—along with the liberation that this brought spiritually, emotionally and socially—is the context for “salvation by grace through faith.”

Timothy Tennent writes: “The New Testament celebrates a salvific transformation that has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Personal salvation in the New Testament is inextricably linked to becoming a part of the

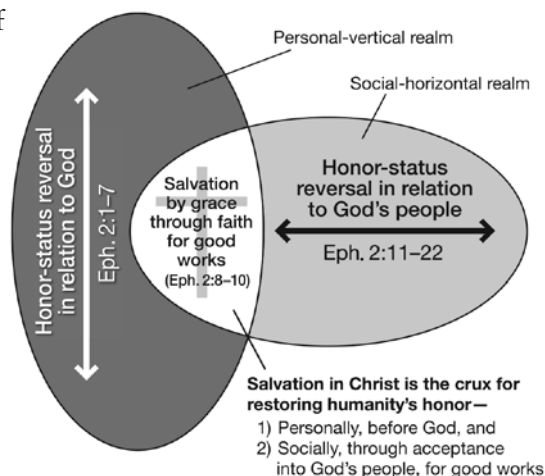


Figure 5: Salvation is the crux of two dimensions of honor-status reversal in Ephesians 2

This “salvation verse” sits at the intersection of vertical and horizontal dimensions of honor-

new humanity of Ephesians 2:15” (Tennent, 2010, 62). As salvation is vertical because sin is personal, so

also is salvation horizontal because sin is corporate. According to Hiebert: “There is both personal and corporate sin and personal and corporate dimensions to God’s redemption” (Hiebert, 2010, 99).

Is Honor-status Reversal a Fundamental Aspect of the Ministry of Jesus?

In Luke 2 is a scene where the parents of Jesus have brought the child Jesus into the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22–38). The man Simeon is there, “righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.” There is deep emotion which permeates this passage of scripture. Simeon is longing for the restoration of Israel’s honor among the nations, “waiting for the consolation to Israel” (v. 25). He picks Jesus up in his arms and says:

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:29–32).

Then something curious happens:

And his father and his mother marveled at what was

said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:33–35; emphasis mine).

Simeon is under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (2:25). He hints at the royal identity of Jesus the Messiah: “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall [↓] and rising [↑] of many in Israel.”

Simeon summarizes the ministry of Jesus as a ministry of honor-status reversal! The humble/contrite or shamed will be elevated in honor, while the proud/arrogant or honorable will be brought low and shamed.

Could it be that with respect to the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame, honor-status reversal is the very essence of the ministry of Jesus?

Richard Bauckham does not use the word motif; nor does he use the phrase honor-status reversal, but he does use the phrase

“consistent divine strategy” in referring to Paul’s proclamation of how God works to bring down the high-minded and arrogant while he elevates the low and humble. Alluding to the opening chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, Bauckham writes:

In this passage and its context Paul does something rather remarkable. In the first place, by echoing the Old Testament, he identifies a consistent divine strategy, a characteristic way in which God works, to which the origins of the church at Corinth conform. That God chose the first Corinthian converts is the God who chose the least significant of all the people (Israel) for his own (Deuteronomy 7:7). This is Hannah’s God, who exalts the lonely and humbles the exalted (1 Samuel 2:3–8), just as he is also Mary’s God, who feels the hungry and dismisses the rich (Luke 1:51–53). This is the God who chose the youngest of Jesse’s sons, David, the one no one had even thought to summon (1 Sam 16:6–13). This is the God who habitually overturns status, not in

order to make the non-élite a new élite, but in order to abolish status, to establish his kingdom in which no one can claim privilege over others and all gladly surrender privilege for the good of others (Bauckham, 2003, 51).

In light of the abundance of scriptural examples, how can we not agree with Bauckman? Honor-status reversal is a “consistent divine strategy.” Honor-status reversal is a dominant motif of the Bible and a central feature of the gospel.

Part 2: Honor-status Reversal is Central to the Gospel, Signified by Four Iconic Words: Cross, Story, Mission, Kingdom

Iconic Word #1: CROSS

Honor-status reversal is exemplified by Christ’s journey, which has the cross as its turning point (see Figure 2). The atonement of Christ on the cross, followed by his resurrection, is the axis of all theology, all mission, all history. Therefore, this truth is never to be compromised: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”

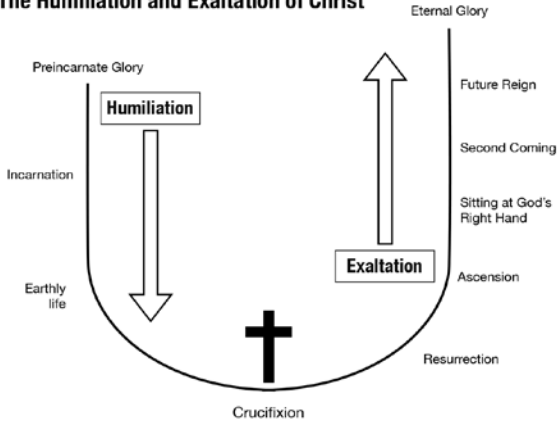
The Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ

Figure 2: Humiliation and exaltation of Christ as honor-status reversal

(John 3:16). All theology and all mission endeavors of the church must forever point to the cross of Jesus, where both God's love for the world and God's passion for his glory (John 12:27–28) find ultimate expression. That people "should not perish but have eternal life" is the gift of salvation communicated by the church to all the peoples of the world. The cross of Christ is the crux of our salvation.

Iconic Word #2: STORY

A gospel characterized by honor-status reversal is a powerful narrative for the unreached and unengaged peoples. The drama of honor-status reversal is inherently a journey, a story. It is easy to grasp the Bible as a series of sub-narratives with honor-status reversal as the motif—all inside

of a larger grand narrative. The various elements of an epic story are all present in the Bible's stories of honor-status reversal: *plot, setting, journey, family, romance, honor and shame, surprise, suffering, courage, mystery, tragedy, conquest, hero, enemy and villain, blood, crescendo and climax, destination and beatific ending.*

Moreover, in proclaiming the comprehensive story of Christ's honor-status reversal, Christians can avoid preaching a truncated gospel. Theologian Damon So of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies explains why:

Regarding the content of the Christian gospel, the gospel story of Jesus occupies the central place, but students should be instructed to avoid majoring on one phase of Jesus' earthly life only, as often seen in Western preaching. Often, liberal churches in the West major on the life of Jesus, while conservative churches often major on the death of Jesus. This dichotomy between majoring on the

life and majoring on the death of Jesus closely corresponds to the general dichotomy in mission between “social action only” and “proclamation only,” neither of which grasp the full gospel story of Jesus and thereby do not practice the holistic gospel in mission.

By presenting the more complete story of Jesus and his birth, baptism, temptations, public ministry, entry into Jerusalem, death, resurrection, and universal reign, the oral story approach employed in non-Western contexts has presented a more holistic picture of Jesus Christ who thus *in the power of his person* has drawn many people unto himself (So, 2013; emphasis in original).

I heartily agree with Dr. So and contend there is powerful, inherent missional quality in the honor-status reversal story of Jesus for unengaged and unreached peoples.

a. *An epic story.* The global gospel is much more than a list of theological propositions about sin and

guilt, forgiveness and heaven; it is also a narrative of the conflict of rival kingdoms saturated with the dynamics of honor and shame. This epic story of God is one into which all persons and peoples are invited; this story offers the comprehensive solution to the problem of sin, brokenness, guilt, shame—in humanity, the world, and the cosmos. Thus, the gospel as a narrative of honor-status reversal is well-suited for persons and peoples for whom an oral style is the dominant way of learning and living.

b. *A story for the unreached.* If the global gospel as an honor/shame narrative is ideally suited for oral peoples, then it also has superior resonance for the unreached and unengaged peoples of the world (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and tribal)—the majority of whom have honor and shame as a prominent cultural value.

c. *A story for the shamed and marginalized.* All people groups will be represented by those who believe; they are promised glory and honor at the end of the biblical grand narrative (Rev. 21:22–27). None

are marginalized, because Christ has transformed at least some from every nation and people into a unique reflection of his glory. What an honor for all the redeemed to be seated at the marriage supper of the Lamb, the wedding feast of Christ and his bride (Rev. 19:6–9). What a hope! What a gospel! What a Savior!

**Honor-status reversal
in the gospel is a
pattern for mission...**

Iconic Word #3: MISSION

Honor-status reversal in the gospel is a pattern for mission; it is inherently mission-in-motion. Jesus said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). As Jesus was sent by the Father *in the incarnational dynamic of honor- status reversal*, even so Jesus is actively sending believers today in the *same incarnational dynamic* of honor-status reversal. Believers and churches are to get on board, and enter God’s ongoing story in motion. It is the life of the gospel of Jesus in the same mode of mission-in- motion. The life of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, was a ministry of honor-status reversal— he was “appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). People were and are moved as a result

of Christ’s ministry. Likewise, *the gospel itself* is a powerful multifaceted dynamic that creates upward and downward motion— honor-status reversal—both for those who receive Christ (John 1:12) and for those who reject him.

a. *Camaraderie, not superiority.* The gospel is indeed “the power of God for salvation to everyone who

believes” (Rom. 1:16). But believers must share and live the gospel in camaraderie with (not in superiority over) all peoples—including those of lower status, the poor and oppressed. As members of a global missionary community, Western Christians are still making the shift, as Bosch says, from padre to compadre, no longer participating “as the ones who have all the answers, but as learners like everyone else” (Bosch, 1991, p.453). Jesus calls us: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15).

b. *Against the status quo.* Believers living by the gospel

of honor-status reversal are willing to violate the *status quo* by stepping down to serve among the poor and the powerless, not only as friends, but also as advocates and fellow sufferers. Jesus blessed the poor and lowly, the hungry, the persecuted (Luke 6:20–23) and pronounced “woes” against the high- status rich, powerful, and comfortable (Luke 6:24–25)—while bringing liberty to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Likewise, those who represent Christ, and the gospel of honor- status reversal, are willing to speak against the *status quo*, challenging any social structure—any existing state of affairs—that is in contradiction to the Kingdom of Christ. This is the prophetic element of the gospel that may not necessarily change the state of oppressive affairs, but which, nevertheless, is good news to the poor by the hope which it brings.

- c. *Repentance for the church, not just the lost.* The global gospel of honor-status reversal leads Christians to embrace servanthood and vulnerability as the default mode of mission, and therefore are wary (if not repentant) of mission as an

extension of Western power and cultural superiority. The days of mission linked with power and empire are over, or should be. Mission in the 21st century must be mission as servanthood, learning by listening, collaboration, and above all humility—through the very mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

- d. *Vulnerability trumps power.* Jesus calls us to live the global gospel as a descent into servanthood and vulnerability (Mark 10:43; 2 Cor. 13:4). This kind of ministry is more appealing to secular, postmodern individuals and peoples who are alienated by the misuse of power by the church, may have been victimized by people in the church, or who simply see the hypocrisies of Christendom. Many see a controlling church which, over the centuries, has too often reinforced the powerful status quo at the expense of the powerless and marginalized—contradicting the life and teachings of Jesus. Moreover, a gospel that celebrates the acceptance, honor, and community of its members will be much more attractive for the secular multitudes in the West

who are often plagued by sin, isolation and shame, fractured families, or a perpetual sense of homelessness.

Iconic Word #4: KINGDOM

Honor-status reversal points to the kingdom reign of Christ. The gospel that embodies honor-status reversal celebrates the already-but-not-yet reign of Christ in his kingdom. The cross was not a morbid pause against which God had to struggle in order to raise Christ from the dead; it was more like an unstoppable, gravitas of glory that catapulted Christ into the highly exalted regal honor and glory of his kingdom. Believers live with the effect and the affect of this new honor—that honor being in Christ himself, in his family the church, and in his kingdom.

a. *New source of honor in Christ the King.* Followers of Jesus have a new source of ascribed honor; it is the honor of God himself as the Father of a new family, a new kinship group called the church, the body of Christ, the “one new man” (Eph. 2:15). “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12; cf. 1 John 3:1). The

spiritual DNA of those who follow Christ has been altered because they are “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13)—a regal identity for the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9).

- b. *Honor surplus in the Kingdom of God.* Since God has relocated the Christian’s ascribed honor into a new community and kingdom ruled by the beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:13), believers experience an honor surplus saturated with the love of God. This honor surplus is not just an objective doctrinal truth concerning a heavenly destiny (Eph. 2:6; cf. Rev. 3:21), it is also a subjective visceral reality that believers feel today: “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). Paul was speaking of an already, present- tense experience of the Holy Spirit, not a theological concept pointing to the distant future.
- c. *Unlimited good in Christ.* Believers have a new unlimited source of honor today. Believers have had their honor

relocated into the regal King and his kingdom: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). Thus, believers can “vacate the playing field” (Neyrey, 1998, 214) of honor competition and violence, live in the peace of God (Matt. 5:9), resist temptation, absorb shame, and

even suffer persecution if necessary (Matt. 5:10). They are freed from the dark side of honor and shame—rivalry, honor competition, honor-based violence. The demonic dynamic of “honor-trumps-ethics” is replaced by the highest freedom of Christ-empowered righteousness. They have exchanged the binding yoke of “limited good”⁶—for the freedom of the unlimited good of Christ, by which they experience the abundance of God’s honor and glory, for he “will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Honor/shame Dynamics at the Core of the Gospel

We have observed that honor-status reversal is a motif of

scripture. Steve Hawthorne simply concludes that “the core of the drama that impels all things [is that] God’s great honor reverses deep shame” (Mischke 2015, 18). We have also seen that honor-status reversal

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

is inherent—that is, essential, fundamental, indeed, basic to the gospel of Christ.

What does this mean for contextualizing the gospel in our multicultural neighborhoods? What does it mean for the multitudes of unreached peoples for whom honor and shame is a primary cultural value? What does this mean for the preaching of the gospel?

I agree with Jackson Wu who simply states: “The gospel is already contextualized for honor/shame cultures.” And, “honor and shame are built into the framework of the gospel itself” (Wu 2014).

This means that the global gospel of Jesus Christ has the potential to resonate with the peoples of our multicultural world—and with persons struggling with shame—perhaps far more than we ever realized.

Concluding Questions

In this article, I introduce honor-status reversal as a dominant motif of scripture. Space does not permit a thorough investigation of the implications of this motif for the practice of orality in the mission of the church. However, the following questions are offered here to stimulate further dialog and study:

1. Reframing the gospel.

If the orality practitioners recognized in their scriptures the motif of honor-status reversal as vital to God's story, how would this impact the way Christianity is framed—both for gospel communication and for Christian discipleship? What if believers were trained to articulate the gospel in a way that extended beyond the Western legal framework to one that is legal plus regal?

2. Resonating with the unreached.

If it is true that a gospel motif of honor-status reversal has great potential to resonate with unreached and unengaged peoples (many of whom are socially marginalized), how would this shape the practice of orality in missions? What new endeavors would mission agencies pursue to test this probability?

3. Reversing honor in our practice.

What if cross-cultural workers and orality practitioners more consistently lived out their mission in a way characterized by honor-status reversal—by which the shamed are honored and by which vulnerability trumps power and empire (John 20:21)? What if the Global Church's efforts in collaboration more consistently included the attitudes and practices of 1 Corinthians 12:23: "and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor?" How might we imagine these practices advancing the *missio Dei* in the 21st century?

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Endnotes

1. Figure 2 is adapted from a diagram I originally found on the online site of ESV Study Bible (<http://esvbible.org>) in connection to Philippians 2:5–11. This diagram is no longer included in their resources.
2. For an overview of the honor/shame dynamics in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, see Tennent, 89–91. Tennent cites Jerome Neyrey, (1994): 113–37. "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Semeia* 68.
3. Ten times in Matthew's Gospel Jesus is referred to as the Son of David, indicating the high honor accorded to David by God in Jewish tradition.
4. ESV Study Bible, Kindle edition locations 59670–59671.
5. Limited space does not permit us to include examples of all Old Testament prophets. But honor-status reversal is a widespread dynamic in all of the OT prophetic books. Examples include Jeremiah 33:1–13; Lamentations 5:1–22; Hosea 10:1–6; 14:4–7; Joel 2:18–29; Amos 2:1–16; 9:11–15; Obadiah 1–21; John 2:1–9; Micah 7:8–17; Nahum 2:1–12; Habakkuk 2:6–20; Zephaniah 2:5–15; 3:14–20; Haggai 2:20–22; Zechariah 3:1–6; 8:1–11:3; Malachi 3:11–4:3.
6. For an explanation of the honor/shame dynamic of the image of limited good, see Mischke, 2015, pp. 98–103.





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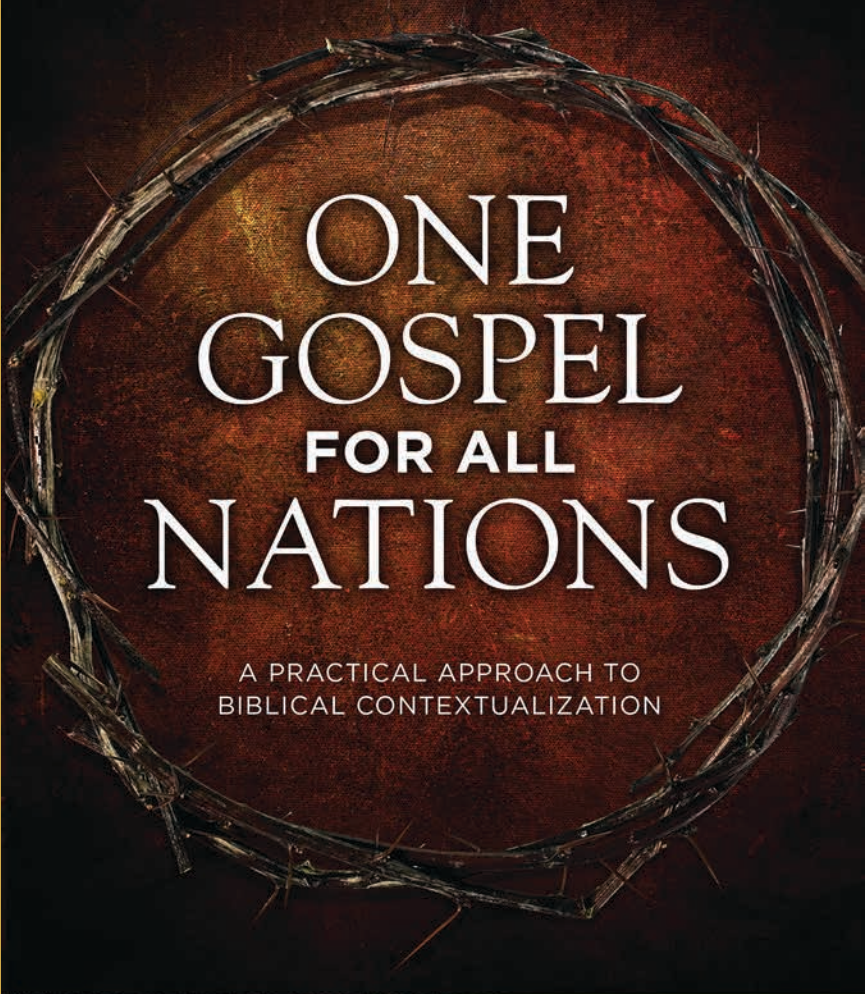


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