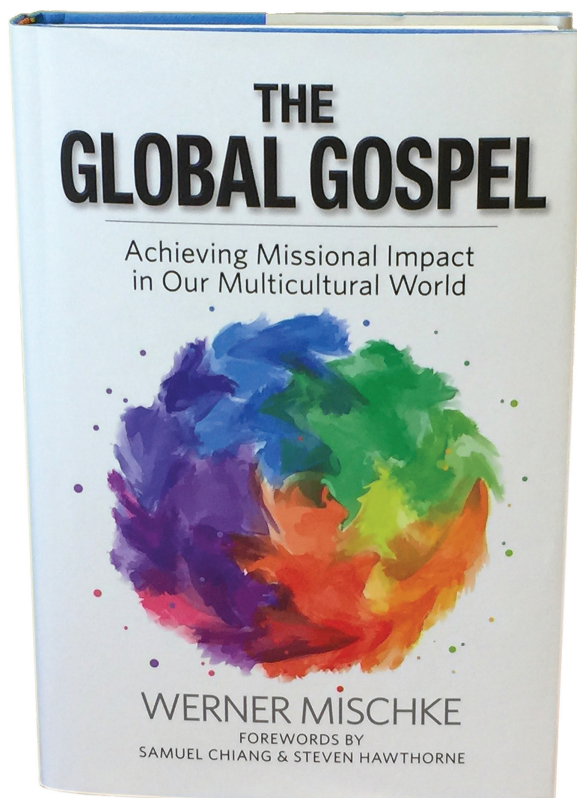


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Chapter 2.1:
“Honor/Shame Dynamic #1: Love of Honor”



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HONOR

Honor/Shame Dynamic #1: Love of Honor

Why is this important?

- Demonstrates from Scripture that the love of honor can be rooted in both evil and good motivations.
- Helps explain stories in the Bible in which people appear strangely “selfish.”

The epic film *Gladiator* depicts the violence and values of the Roman Empire. When the hero Maximus inspires the other gladiators to fight, he cries, “For the glory of Rome!” And the Romans’ love of honor and glory is on full display.

In the ancient Middle East, including the Roman Empire, the *love of honor* was a core value; it was simply *understood*. We know this because men wrote this down before, during, and after the Roman Empire.

For example, before the Roman Empire came into existence, the Greek philosopher Aristotle said:

Now the greatest external good we should assume to be the thing which we offer as a tribute to the gods and which is most coveted by men of high station, and is the prize awarded for the noblest deeds; and such a thing is honour, for *honour is clearly the greatest of external goods ... it is honour above all else which great men claim and deserve.*¹ (Emphasis mine.)

J. E. Lendon references the Roman lawyer, author, and magistrate, Pliny the Younger, who lived in the first century (c. 61–112). “Pliny wrote hundreds of letters, many of which still survive, that are regarded as a historical source for the time

1. As quoted in Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 5.

period.”² Lendon comments on the typical affection for honor, glory and fame among the Romans:

How little surprising, then, the sentiments of Pliny the Younger: “Men differ in their views, but I deem that man happiest of all who enjoys the anticipation of good and abiding *fame*, and who, assured of posterity’s judgment, *lives now in possession of the glory* that he will then have.” To the historian, it was naturally the *pursuit of renown* that raised man above the animal. And the orator took it for granted that *honour stood at the root of human motivation* and human institutions.”³ (Emphasis mine.)

The great Christian leader Augustine of Hippo (354–430) lived during the latter part of the Roman Empire. He said, “For the glory that the Romans burned to possess, be it known, is the favourable judgment of men who think well of other men.”⁴

Love of honor: Zeba Crook points out that the Greeks even had a word for it—*philotimia*.⁵ Jerome Neyrey simply states, “The ancients name love of honor and praise as their premier value.”⁶

Examples

Consider the blatant pursuit of honor we find among the disciples:

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he [Jesus] asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about *who was the greatest*” (Mark 9:33–34). (Emphasis mine.)

Jesus caught them in the act. “What were you discussing on the way?” (As though Jesus didn’t know.) The disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, who had the most honor, prestige, or power in their group. They were engaging in honor competition. The Bible calls it *rivalry*.⁷ Here’s how Jesus responded.

And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (v. 35).

Jesus called his disciples. What he said would be opposite their social, religious, and cultural ways. This was hard to grasp. Jesus said, in effect: *I understand your love of honor. I get it. Like you, I’m also very interested in honor and glory. So in my kingdom, here’s how you gain honor. It’s simple. If you want to be first—if you want to have the most honor—you must be the servant of all.*

This is upside-down—a reversal of our normal ways. But it is God’s way.

In the next chapter, Mark 10:35–45, this theme is amplified. The disciples James and John, the sons of Zebedee, tell Jesus, “Teacher, we want you to do for us

2. “Pliny the Younger,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger, accessed 2 December 2013.

3. Lendon, Kindle edition locations 465–68.

4. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 17.

5. Crook, 63.

6. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 17.

7. Philippians 1:15

whatever we ask of you.” This was bold. If I was Jesus, I would have said, *Get real. Come back to me when you have a more reasonable request.*

Surprisingly, Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?” (v. 36).

And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (v. 37).

This is nothing less than audacious to my Western mindset. What a blatant request for a favor from Jesus. What were James and John displaying? *Love of honor!*

Did Jesus rebuke James and John for their seemingly selfish request? No. Interestingly, Jesus ended up *endorsing* their pursuit of honor, although he turned it upside-down.

And Jesus called them [all of his disciples] 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. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (vv. 42–45).

Jesus was teaching: *In God’s kingdom, you gain honor in a way that’s backward from the ways of the world. Here’s how: If you want to be first—if you want to have the most honor—you must be the slave of all. And here’s the proof of the principle: The very one who has and deserves the most honor—the Son of Man—is one who humbles himself by giving his life “as a ransom for many.”*

Honor and shame: A kingdom summary—dark side and bright side

The interaction between Jesus and the disciples concerning the desire of honor raises a question: *Is the pursuit of honor, the love of honor, the longing for honor—always sinful?* It appears that Jesus tells us, *No, there is an appropriate pursuit for honor.*

However, first let’s delve into the dark and sinful side of the *love of honor* that the Bible clearly reveals. Let’s consider first some select passages in Genesis in the light of honor and shame.

We discover first of all that before sin there was no shame (Gen 2:25). Lewis Smedes describes it beautifully: “Adam and Eve walked naked with God in the cool of the garden and felt no shame. ... They felt no shame because they felt perfect trust. When they lost trust they felt shame. And so it was that ‘the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them.’”⁸ God provided a covering for their nakedness (Gen 3:21) through “garments of skins,” thereby alleviating some of their shame and restoring some of their honor.⁹

8. Smedes, 63.

9. The *ESV Study Bible* notes: “Because God provides garments to clothe Adam and Eve, thus requiring the death of an animal to cover their nakedness, many see a parallel here related to (1) the system of animal sacrifices to atone for sin later instituted by God through the leadership of Moses in Israel, and (2) the eventual sacrificial death of Christ as an atonement for sin” (from *ESV Study Bible*, 57). This author agrees that these verses describe how humanity’s sin problem of nakedness and shame (3:10–11) is solved by God’s mercy through sacrifice (Gen 3:21). It follows that as blood was shed in Gen 3:21 for the sin and shame of Adam and Eve, so also Christ’s blood was shed for the sin and shame of all humanity. Do these foundational verses in Genesis suggest that the meaning of Christ’s atonement may be understood, in part, as the covering of shame? Could it be that humanity’s need for the covering of shame is just as *theologically basic* as humanity’s need for the forgiveness of guilt?

Origins of shame in Genesis—how the sinful “love of honor” leads to shame	
Passage	Honor/shame dynamic
Adam and Eve / The Fall	
And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen 2:25).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adam and Eve lived in the honor of God’s presence in the beatific Garden. • Their condition is described as the absence of shame (not the absence of guilt nor the absence of fear).
He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satan challenges God’s honor by questioning God’s Word and integrity.
For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ... (Gen 3:5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You will be like God” is an appeal to pride, the sinful love of honor.
So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Gen 3:6).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The desire for increased honor (love of honor) is inherent in saying “the tree was to be desired to make one wise.” • Living in God’s presence was not enough, a dishonor to God.
But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen 3:9–11).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sinful love of honor led to the Fall. • Disobedience to God is equivalent to dishonoring God. • Self-awareness about one’s nakedness means shame. • Shame leads to hiding because of fear.
... cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life (Gen 3:17).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ground is cursed; their work will require pain—both of which connote shame
Cain and Abel	
In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 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, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell (Gen 4:3–5).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is likely that giving the firstborn of his flock, as Abel did, was a more sacrificial offering than what Cain offered, expressing more gratitude and greater honor to God. • God “had regard” for Abel’s offering, but “he had no regard” for Cain’s. The jealousy of Cain (love of honor/ honor competition) led to the murder of Abel.
Tower of Babel	
Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth” (Gen 11:4).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear expression of the love honor is contained in the phrase, “and let us make a name for ourselves.” This is human-derived honor, a stark contrast to God-derived honor given Abraham when God promised him: “I will ... make your name great” (Gen 12:2). • God disallowed it, confusing their languages to disperse them across the earth (Gen 11:9).

Figure 2.03: Select examples in Genesis—the love of honor leads to shame

Shame, as the result of the evil pursuit of honor, is at the very origin of humanity’s sin in Genesis. “There is a prominent contrast in the Garden of Eden account (Gen 2:25; 3:7–10) between the pre-sin lack of shame, and the shame-related experiences (hiding, awareness of nakedness) after Eve and Adam ate the fruit. Thus the initial experience after sin entered the world seems to have been shame.”¹⁰

10. Dyrness and Kärkkäinen, 815.

Another clear expression of the sinful dimension of the love of honor is expressed in Isaiah 14 in the account of the fall of the King of Babylon (Is 14:12–14).¹¹ “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; ... I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly ... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

Of course, God condemns the King of Babylon for his arrogant pursuit of honor. God says through Isaiah, “But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit” (Isa 14:15).

From the Fall of humanity ... to the first murder ... to the origin of language ... and the fall of the King of Babylon ... there is clearly a very dark side to the love of honor as revealed in Scripture. The prideful love of honor is *so dark* that it brought destruction, pain, oppression, confusion, death—to the full spectrum of humanity.

However, this book will demonstrate that honor and shame has a bright and glorious side as well. In fact, you may be surprised to discover that we’ll spend as much or more time on the *bright side* of honor and shame as on the dark side. But for now, here is the point:

Whether we observe *love of honor* as a value in the kingdom of darkness—or *love of honor* as a value in the kingdom of God—you will discover honor and shame as a pervasive, pivotal cultural value and emotional dynamic in Scripture.

Love of honor—the bright side

We have seen the origins of the dark side of honor and shame in Genesis—how the sinful love of honor led to shame. We now turn to the *bright side*, *the glorious side* of the love of honor. From the Old Testament, I’ll begin with two examples. The first example involves Moses; the second involves David:

“Show me your glory”

And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Ex 33:17–20).

“Please show me your glory.” What a bold request! Moses wanted to behold the glory of God. His love of glory was expressed as the desire to essentially see God. Curiously, God did not chastise Moses for his desire. However, God could only partially grant Moses’s request.

“Awake, my glory”

The second Old Testament example involves David when he was fleeing from Saul in the cave (Ps 57; 1 Sam 22). Here we find a magnificent expression of faith

11. In the immediate historical context, Isaiah 14:12–15 refers to the King of Babylon. This passage is sometimes described as the fall of Satan; this is because Satan is the leader of the kingdom of darkness, which in Revelation 18 is called Babylon.

in God. David laments his vulnerability and the darkness of this cave experience (Ps 57:1-4); he acknowledges the anxiety and fear he feels because Saul and his army are out to kill him. Remarkably, David then calls for God to be exalted and glorified “above the heavens” and “over all the earth” (v. 5).

Next, David speaks to his own soul—and to God:

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations (Ps 57:7-9).

“*Awake, my glory!*” David is expressing his *longing for glory*. What is the Bible telling us? David had been anointed king by Samuel some years before (1 Sam 16:1-13), but he was still not king. In fact, here he was in a cave, afraid for his life! Would he ever become king and experience the honor and glory of his regal destiny?

In the midst of this dark cave, David envisions his regal identity being fully expressed—and having international, if not *global*, influence.¹² David describes what this global influence will look like: “*I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.*”

Is there a God-honoring way to love honor and seek glory?

Consider Paul’s words to the Romans:

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing *seek for glory and honor and immortality*, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury (Rom 2:6-8). (Emphasis mine).

Notice Paul’s description of believers: They are people “who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality;” it is to *them* that God “will give eternal life.” And this is contrasted with “those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth.” How can that be? How can seeking “glory and honor and immortality” be the opposite of “self-seeking”? To our Western Christian sensibilities, this seems dissonant, weird.

Consider also in John 5 (a chapter loaded with references to honor and glory) what Jesus said to the Pharisees:

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:44).

Here we see the unbelief of the Pharisees described as *not seeking glory*—the failure to “seek the glory that comes from the only God.”

Another Scripture in the same vein is John 12:42-43. Jesus is speaking of “the authorities [who] believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it ... for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

12. “I will awake the dawn” (Ps 57:8) is poetic speech for “I will make the sun rise”—an indirect way of saying “I will have influence beyond the horizon,” i.e. global influence.

Jesus is making a comparison: He is comparing the love of *honor which comes from man*—to another kind of honor—*the honor which has its source in God himself*. Jesus is saying that there is a right and proper seeking of honor and glory from God. It’s a reflection of honor/shame dynamic #1—love of honor.

Glory to God and glory for humanity

As Christians, when we think of the word *glory* in the Bible, we rightly think of God. As Christians we believe that the glory of God is paramount in all of life. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins this way:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Perhaps the most concise statements about the crux of God’s glory were written by Apostle Paul:

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom 11:36). ... So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). ... To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph 3:21).

But there is an aspect about this word *glory* in Scripture that is frequently ignored. It is this: *the many Scriptures in which “glory” refers to humanity*. In fact, of the 470 cases in which the words *glory*, *glorify*, *glorified*, or *glorious* appear in the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible, 139 refer to humanity.

My research yielded these results: Of the English words in the Bible¹³ translated as *glory*, *glorify*, *glorified*, and *glorious* ...

- 65% relate to God and his domain.
- 29% relate to humanity.¹⁴
- 6% relate to “other”—neither God nor humanity.

For me, the surprise is that nearly one-third of the “glory verses” relate to humanity. Here’s a short selection:

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor (Ps 8:5).

On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God (Ps 62:7).

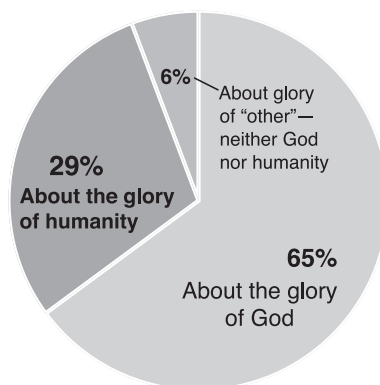


Figure 2.04: Usage of the word “glory” and its derivatives in the Bible—29% refers to humanity

13. This analysis was done using the *Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

14. There are eleven cases in which humanity’s glory is embedded in the glory of Christ, so the “case” is counted twice. Some examples are 2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:27; 2 Thes 1:10, 12; 2:14; 2 Tim 2:10.

Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you (Isa 55:5).

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:44).

... for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God (John 12:43).

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one (John 17:22).

To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (Rom 2:7).¹⁵

... that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:21).

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (1 Cor 2:7).

Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones (Jude 1:8).

What are we to make of all these references to the glory of humanity—the psalmist David praying, “Awake, my glory” ... believers seeking “the glory that comes from the only God” ... Jesus telling the Father about the glory “I have given to them” ... creation being set free and obtaining the “glory of the children of God” ... and believers being called the “glorious ones”?

All this biblical “glory and honor” about humanity is first of all attributable to all humans (despite the Fall) having been made in the image of a good and glorious God (Gen 1:27). It is then magnified by the believer’s faith and identity in Christ.

Peter writes to believers in exile in Asia Minor, “So the honor is for you to believe” (1 Pet 2:7). This *longing for honor* relates to what it means to follow Jesus. This is an answer to humanity’s struggle with shame—and *longing for honor*.

Let’s observe the contrast in the chart on the next page between honor/shame dynamics in the kingdom of this world versus the honor/shame dynamics in the kingdom-reign of God.

When you read the Bible with an awareness of this *emotional* landscape—the love of/longing for honor and fear of shame—God’s Word simply makes more sense and it has more impact. I contend that by incorporating the emotional variable in Scripture interpretation, you will come closer to understanding how the original authors and hearers of the Scriptures would have experienced God’s Word. And remember, this is

15. Jewett comments on Rom 2:7: “Paul is deliberately employing honorific categories to appeal to his audience. ... Both glory and honor are central motivations in the culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, where young people were taught to emulate the behavior of ideal prototypes. ... That one should seek honor and glory was simply assumed in Rome. ... Later in Romans, Paul will link ‘eternal life’ more closely with grace in Christ (Rom 5:21; 6:21–22), thus removing it from the framework of a reward for good behavior. But there is no hint of this clarification in 2:7, which simply conforms to what Paul perceives to be the orientation of his audience.” See Jewett, *Romans*, 205–6.

one of the goals of hermeneutics: Get as close as possible to how the original hearers and readers would have understood God’s revelation—to try to stand in their shoes.

A kingdom summary—dark side and bright side

Love of honor—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God		
	Kingdom of this world	Kingdom-reign of God
	Honor is self-derived: “Let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4)	Honor is God-derived: God says, “I will bless you and make your name great” (Gen 12:2)
	Honor is located exclusively in human- based family, institutions, achievement	Honor is located in the kingdom of God and Christ the King
	Shame is the loss of honor, and the fear of disconnection from one’s family, people or other group	No shame for God’s people when living in obedience under God’s loving reign
	Violence, exclusion, oppression, death	Peace, harmony, social progress, abundance
	Destructive honor competition is inevitable	Destructive honor competition is avoidable

Figure 2.05: Love of honor—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God

Action points

- *Fast-forward:* To explore ways that the *love of honor* can shape a contextualized presentation of the gospel of Christ, turn to Section 3, Chapter 1.
- *Reflect:* Consider the location of your honor. (1) To what extent is your honor—the honor you actually *experience*—located in your family, job, wealth, sports team, ministry, education, or appearance? (2) To what extent is your honor—the honor you actually *experience*—located in Jesus Christ, his church, and his kingdom? How do (1) and (2) compare?
- *Bible study:* Do a word study in the Psalms on the word *glory* and of the related words *glorify*, *glorified*, and *glorious*. Examine how many refer to the glory of God and how many refer to the glory of humanity. What conclusions can you make from this comparison?
- *Teaching:* Develop a lesson about salvation incorporating the longing for honor and the covering of shame based on 1 Peter. (Alternatively, base your message on Romans 3:23, Romans 2:7–8, or John 5:44.)
- *Mission:* Some mission leaders and cross-cultural workers recognize the dark side of honor and shame (e.g., ethical compromise, honor-based violence). This can lead to looking down on honor/shame societies as culturally inferior. Can we also see the *bright side* of honor/shame as revealed in Scripture? In what ways might this impact your church or mission team?