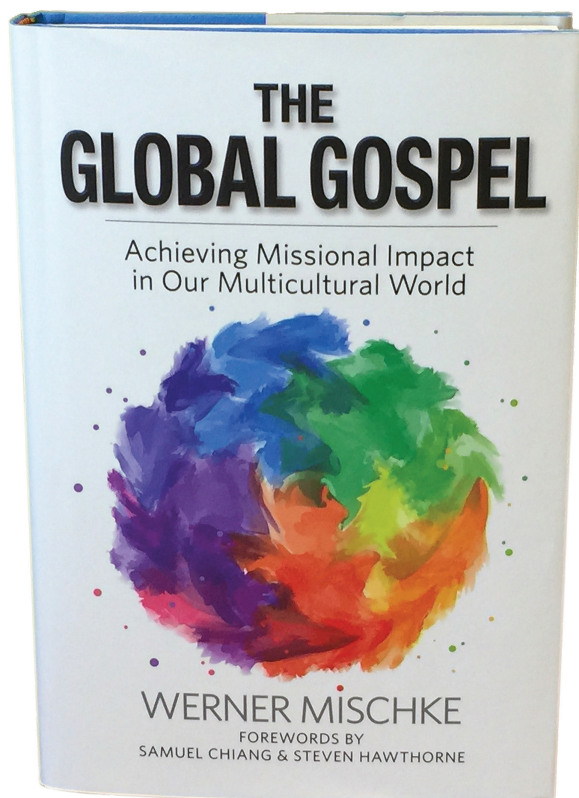


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Chapter 2.2:
“Honor/Shame Dynamic #2: Two Sources of Honor—
Ascribed and Achieved”



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Honor/Shame Dynamic #2: Two Sources of Honor—Ascribed and Achieved

Why is this important?

- Shows how honor-status is attached to title, rank, family name, and social position (ascribed honor)—compared to status and respect gained by competition or aggression (achieved honor).
- Helps the Bible reader see the dramatic attention given by Scripture's authors to the ascribed and achieved honor of Jesus Christ.
- Helps pastors, teachers and counselors better communicate that the believer's immense *ascribed* honor in Jesus Christ finds expression in words such as *adoption, child of God, heir*—and *member* of the body of Christ.

Definition

According to Jerome Neyrey, "Worth and value are either *ascribed* to individuals by others, or they are *achieved* by them."¹

There are two sources of honor—*ascribed* and *achieved*.²

- **Ascribed honor** "refers to the granting of respect and given to a person from members of the two basic institutions of antiquity, namely: family/kinship or state/politics."³

1. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 15.

2. This point is true for honor/shame societies, but is also true in general. People in all societies—whether they have honor and shame as their pivotal cultural value or not—have only two sources of honor: ascribed and achieved.

3. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 15.

- **Achieved honor** refers to honor gained by “competition, aggression, and envy: ... Some scholars of the ancient world describe it as an ‘agonistic society,’ by which they point to its intensely competitive nature and the common envy shown successful persons.”⁴

It is clear; *ascribed honor* is more about one’s *being*—derived from family, kinship, tribe, place of birth, or title, regardless of individual merit. On the other hand, *achieved honor* is more about one’s *behavior*—achieved honor is gained by action through honor competition in the arenas of education, sport, politics, warfare, or simply the daily “social game of push-and-shove.” The diagrams used in Section 1 to describe the difference between shame and guilt can now also be extended to describe the difference between ascribed and achieved honor.



Figure 2.06: *Ascribed honor* relates more to one’s *being*—“who I am;” *achieved honor* relates more to one’s *behavior*—“what I do”

Examples

Let’s begin with verses about the *ascribed* honor of Jesus Christ. First ...

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mat 1:1).

The entire first chapter of Matthew is given to establish the honor of Christ’s identity by recording the Jewish family line through which Jesus came. This was extremely important to the Jewish people, and it makes perfect sense that it appears in Matthew’s gospel, since this gospel more than any other was written to the Jewish audience.

Secondly ...

and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17).

Following the baptism of Jesus, God the Father declares the honor of his Son by publicly stating his divine love and pleasure toward him. Now add to that the understanding that *family*—also referred to as *kinship*—is the starting point of each person’s ascribed honor.

Speaking of the importance of family and kinship, New Testament scholar David deSilva says,

In the ancient world, people are not just taken on their “merits.” Instead, their merits begin with the merits (or debits) of their lineage,

4. *Ibid.*, 16. Agonistic behavior is defined as “any social behavior related to fighting. The term has broader meaning than aggressive behavior because it includes threats, displays, retreats, placating aggressors, and conciliation.” See “Agonistic behaviour,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agonistic_behavior, accessed 29 April 2014.

the reputation of their ancestral house. Greeks and Romans receive a basic identity from their larger family: for Romans this takes the form of including the clan name in the name of each individual.⁵

Suddenly, one begins to grasp that this public, divine declaration of the Father's love for his Son is intended to amplify Christ's ascribed honor for everyone watching and listening. For people in honor/shame societies, the force of this cannot be overstated.

Now let's turn to a classic passage about the *achieved* honor of Jesus Christ:

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 2:8–11).

Note the word, "Therefore." This word is a conjunction, linking the super-exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ with what he achieved on the cross. Christ's honor was, in this sense, earned or achieved, because of the humiliation he suffered and the work he accomplished ("It is finished," John 19:30)—through his shameful death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.

Below is a passage that combines both the ascribed honor and achieved honor of Jesus Christ—Hebrews 1:1–5, 8–9:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, [*ascribed honor*] through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature [*ascribed honor*], and he upholds the universe by the word of his power [*achieved honor*]. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high [*achieved honor*],

having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs [*ascribed honor*].

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

Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? [*ascribed honor*]

... But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, [*ascribed honor*] the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." [*achieved honor*]

5. deSilva, 159.

The first chapter of Hebrews is all about the honor of one Person. The author is making an irrefutable case for the exalted honor of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. I contend that the author of Hebrews wants the reader to not just *know* something about Christ, but to *feel* something, to *emote* with obedience, to obey with emotion—in response to our highly exalted Savior. The author *feels astounded, amazed, terrified with delight* concerning the utterly supreme honor, authority, power and glory of Jesus Christ—and he wants the reader to have the same experience.

A Western Christian may observe the opening chapter of Hebrews in a detached, logical way—while the Eastern Christian from an honor/shame culture may perceive this with far more relevance and impact.

For the Western Christian, it would be like looking at a map called the Bible and seeing on that map a river called “The Honor and Glory of the Son of God.” The Western believer says, “Ah, yes, there it is; that is a very big river, indeed.”

Christians from an honor/shame culture—where the value of honor and shame dominates life—would be more likely to receive this passage of Scripture with deep emotional and life-impacting significance. Because of the significance for them of honor and shame, it is *unlike* seeing the name of the river on a map; it is more like *swimming* in that river of truth, being influenced by the strong current of the river, terrified by its depth while enjoying its life-giving vitality. The believer from an honor/shame culture cannot compartmentalize honor and shame as a facet of truth to be acknowledged, but swims in this honor and shame reality every hour of every day of his or her life.

A kingdom summary—dark side and bright side


Ascribed and achieved honor—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God		
	Kingdom of this world	Kingdom-reign of God
 <p>Ascribed Honor</p> <p>Achieved Honor ✓</p>	<p>Ascribed and achieved honor become corrupt and destructive when isolated from God's kingdom—leading to arrogance, pride, and competitive praise-seeking from others apart from God's praise.</p>	<p>ASCRIBED HONOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus has ascribed honor as Son of God, loved by the Father • People gain a new source of honor by being born again, becoming children of God <p>ACHIEVED HONOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus has achieved honor as Savior of the world, conquering sin and shame, death and the devil • Believers gain honor by serving and loving others • Believers experience honor by abiding in a life-long cruciform journey of loving obedience in Christ • God's people involved in athletic, educational, professional, or artistic accomplishment—performed for the glory of God

Figure 2.07: Ascribed and achieved honor—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God