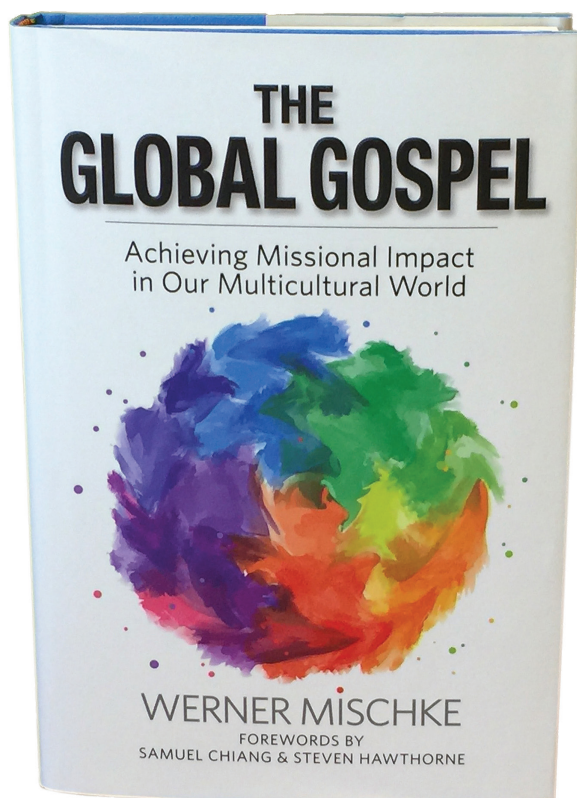


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Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World
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Chapter 2.6:
“Honor/Shame Dynamic #6: Body Language”



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Honor/Shame Dynamic #6: Body Language

Why is this important?

- Explains the “body language” of honor/shame societies in the Bible.
- Contributes to an understanding of why *right hand* and *feet* are woven into the drama God’s story.
- Gives insight to and amplifies the dramatic nature of the conquest of Jesus Christ over sin and shame, death and hell.

Definition

In the social world of the Old and New Testaments, the most honorable parts of the body were considered to be the head, face and hands. One of the most shameful body parts was considered to be the feet.¹

Examples

The foremost example in Scripture of the honor/shame dynamic of *body language* is contained in Psalm 110, a psalm of David. The verse is one of the most-quoted Old Testament verses in the New Testament.

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps 110:1).²

1. Timothy Tennent writes, “In the ancient world honor was tied to the physical body, which was understood as a microcosm of the larger social context. The head and face were the most honorable parts of the body, and the person was thereby honored by being crowned. In contrast, to slap someone in the face or spit on someone’s face brought shame. The less honorable parts of the body, such as genitals and buttocks, must be covered if one’s honor is to be preserved.” See Tennent, 86. Tennent references the work of Julian Pitt-Rivers: “Honor and Shame,” in *Honor and Shame, The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany. (London: Weidenfeld & Nocholson, 1966), 21–77.

2. Concerning Psalm 110, The *ESV Study Bible* states, “This psalm is one of the most cited OT texts in the NT, with quotations or allusions appearing in the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, Hebrews, and the Petrine epistles. Christians sing this psalm to celebrate that Jesus has taken his Davidic kingship by his resurrection . . . , and that God is busy now subduing the Gentiles into the empire of Jesus.” *Crossway Bibles (2009-04-09). ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 75504–75507). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.*

There are two references to the human body: one, the *right hand*, and two, the *foot*. A comparable and related verse is from another psalm of David:

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet (Ps 8:6).

Consider the many verses that refer to Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father, having put all enemies under his feet (emphasis mine in all the quoted verses).

The Gospels

He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my *right hand*, until I put your enemies under your *feet*’?” (Mat 22:43–44).

Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the *right hand* of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mat 26:64).

David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my *right hand*, until I put your enemies under your *feet*’” (Mark 12:36).

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the *right hand* of God (Mark 16:19).

But he said to them, “How can they say that the Christ is David’s son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my *right hand*, until I make your enemies your *footstool*.”’ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?” (Luke 20:41–44).

But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the *right hand* of the power of God (Luke 22:69).

Acts

Being therefore exalted at the *right hand* of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my *right hand*, until I make your enemies your *footstool*’” (Acts 2:33–35).

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the *right hand* of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the *right hand* of God” (Acts 7:55–56).

Paul’s letters

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must

reign until he has put all his enemies under his *feet*. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his *feet*” (1 Cor 15:24–27).

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the *right hand* of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Rom 8:34).

... that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his *right hand* in the heavenly places (Eph 1:20).

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the *right hand* of God (Col 3:1).

Hebrews

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the *right hand* of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3).

And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my *right hand* until I make your enemies a *footstool* for your *feet*”? (Heb 1:13).

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the *right hand* of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (Heb 8:1).

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the *right hand* of God (Heb 10:12).

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the *right hand* of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).

1 Peter

... who has gone into heaven and is at the *right hand* of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (1 Pet 3:22).

What can we conclude from this panorama of verses? Over and over again, New Testament authors emphasize the honor of Jesus Christ by referring to his being seated in exalted honor at the right hand of the Father, with his “enemies a footstool” for his feet. New Testament believers understood the elevated honor of a sovereign ruler who had resoundingly conquered his enemies.

Naturally, this would prompt elevated honor, respect, and obedience to that sovereign king. It was this attitude and lifestyle of honor that Christians were to maintain in their relationship to the one Sovereign, our Lord Jesus Christ.

A kingdom summary—dark side and bright side


Body language—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God		
	Kingdom of this world	Kingdom-reign of God
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaming techniques involving the body are painful and powerful, creating oppression and hurt that can last decades and be transferred to the next generation. • Some shaming techniques involving the body consist of violence resulting in death (honor killings). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus is the one and only King who reigns forever and ever, seated at the right hand of God with his enemies under his feet. • Jesus Christ conquered all enemies of humanity, all enemies of God—sin and shame, death and hell.

Figure 2.14: Body language—kingdom of this world vs. kingdom-reign of God

Action points

- *Fast-forward:* To explore how the dynamic of *body language* can shape a contextualized presentation of the gospel of Christ, turn to Section 3, Chapter 6.
- *Reflect:* Do you ever use your body to shame others, causing hurt or oppression? How do you imagine Jesus setting you free from this sin?
- *Bible study:* Read Psalm 44 and identify each example of “body language.” How does this help you connect with the psalmist’s emotions?
- *Teaching:* Luke 6:6–11 has the story of Jesus healing the man “whose right hand was withered.” Develop a lesson about the bold compassion of Jesus Christ in healing people whose honor is withered.
- *Mission:* Ask your cross-cultural ministry partners or friends from other cultures what *body language* they have in their societies. You might ask specifically about the meaning of *right hand* or *feet*. You may be surprised to discover how commonly significant this is.