

Chapter 4

ANTHROPOLOGY

HUMAN IDENTITY IN SHAME-BASED CULTURES OF THE FAR EAST

In traditional Japanese culture, it was not uncommon for a man to borrow money against his good name, promising to repay the debt by the next New Year. Lenders extended such loans without asking for any collateral because they knew that the sense of obligation to repay was so strong in Japan that a person would not risk their public reputation by defaulting on the loan. In making such a loan, the borrower would say to the lender: "I agree to be publicly laughed at if I fail to repay this sum." But underlying this statement lay a more ominous reality. If the New Year came and the person was unable to repay the debt, the debtor might be expected to commit ritual suicide to clear his name and to protect the honor of his family.¹ Certainly, people from a wide variety of cultures around the world resonate with someone who pledges on his own good name to repay a debt.

We can find many similar examples, such as the famous Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima (1925–1970), who committed ritual suicide after he failed to create a successful rebellion against the adoption of the modern Japanese constitution.² Likewise, public school teachers have committed suicide in Japan because they mispronounced the emperor's name in the reading of the Imperial Rescript on Education or because a school burned down and they failed to rescue the emperor's portrait.

Such stories may seem like distant images from the days of the Samurai warriors, but the role of shame and honor continues to play a dominant role in many cultures outside the Western world. In the last few years dozens of cases of murders and mutilations have been reported in the media in which the perpetrators either went completely unpunished or received extremely light sentences because their crimes were considered an act of honor to cleanse the family of shame.

1. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1946), 151, 156. See also Zuk-Nae Lee, "Korean Culture and Sense of Shame," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 36, no. 2 (June 1999): 187.

2. Yukio Mishima is the pseudonym for Kimitake Hiraoka. See "Yukio Mishima: A 20th Century Warrior," *New Dawn* 29, no. 1 (January–March, 1995): 21.

For example, Kifaya Husayn, a sixteen-year-old girl from Jordan, was tied to a chair by her own brother, who then proceeded to slash her throat. After her death, he ran out into the streets and waved the bloody knife, declaring, "I have killed my sister to cleanse our honor." Kifaya's crime was that she had been raped and had thereby brought disgrace to the family's honor. One twenty-five-year-old Palestinian man who hung his own sister with a rope said that he did not want to kill her, but that he "did it to wash with her blood the family honor that was violated . . . and in response to the will of society that would not have had any mercy on me if I didn't."³ Thousands of murders and mutilations using hot oil or ignited gasoline occur each year, many of which are never reported; if investigated, they are, according to many human rights organizations, officially ruled an accident or suicide.

In June 1871, the United States Marines invaded Kanghwa Do, an island off the coast of Korea. The United States prevailed in the conflict and, in the process, captured over one hundred Korean soldiers. The Marines were shocked when the captured Koreans began to throw themselves into the river and cut their own throats. Those who did not commit suicide began to beg the Marines to kill them rather than return them safely to Korea. For these Korean soldiers, the shame and loss of honor that accompanied their defeat was worse than death. If they died in battle, they would be held in honor in perpetuity by their families, but if they were returned as humiliated captives, their families would never escape the dishonor and shame.⁴

These stories underscore in dramatic fashion the importance of maintaining honor and avoiding the humiliation of public shame in cultures around the world. Anthropologists have consistently observed that the concept of shame and the maintenance of public honor is one of the "pivotal values" outside the West and can be observed in a wide variety of cultures stretching from Morocco in North Africa all the way to Japan in the Far East.⁵

The "shame-based" cultures are often contrasted with what are called "guilt-based" cultures, which are more predominant in the Western world. The purpose of this chapter is to explore this observation made by anthropologists, but from a theological perspective informed by biblical revelation. A few of the key questions that will shape this chapter are as follows: What is the role of guilt versus shame in the formation of human identity? What are the implications of this distinction for our understanding of sin and the application of the work of Christ in our lives? Should a theology of the atonement

3. Syed Kamran Mirza, "Honor Killing—Is It Islamic?" *News from Bangladesh* (July 3, 2005), available at <http://bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2005-07-03&hidType=OPT&hidRecord=0000000000000000050641>. The names of victims such as Fadime Sahindal, Rim Abu Ganem, Hatin Sürücü, Samaira Nazir, and Mariam Abu Hobzi, who all died tragic deaths, are a few of the more prominent examples who have captured international media attention in recent years. For an excellent study of honor and shame in an Islamic context see Bill A. Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam* (Crowborough, East Sussex, UK: MARC, 1988, 1995), ch. 4.

4. Lee, "Korean Culture and Sense of Shame," 189.

5. British social anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers has written extensively on the role of honor and shame, particularly in the Mediterranean world (see *The People of the Sierra* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press], 1961; "Honour and Shame," in J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966], 21–77; J. G. Peristiany and J. Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992]). Roland Muller has observed that the regions of the world most closely identified as having shame-based cultures roughly corresponds to the more well-known 10/40 window (see *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* [Birmingham, UK: Xlibris, 2000], 18).

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be formed differently when articulated within the context of a shame-based culture? However, before any of these questions can be addressed, we need a more careful understanding of what is meant by a shamed-based culture and a guilt-based culture.

GUILT/INNOCENCE AND SHAME/HONOR IN GLOBAL CULTURES

Ruth Benedict was the first anthropologist to categorize Western cultures as guilt-based and Eastern cultures as shame-based. The basic difference, she pointed out, was that "shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior" whereas guilt cultures rely on "an internalized conviction of sin."⁶ According to this distinction, shame arises from the pressure of external sanctions formed in the court of human opinion, whereas guilt arises from some internalized value system.

Lyn Bechtel has argued that "shame stimulates fear of psychological or physical rejection (lack of belonging), abandonment, expulsion, or loss of social position and relies predominantly on external pressure from an individual or group." In contrast, "guilt is a response to a transgression against internalized societal or parental prohibitions or against boundaries that form an internal authority, the conscience."⁷ Guilt generally follows the transgression of a moral law, particularly a law that has been revealed by divine revelation. Shame generally follows any action perceived by the larger group to reduce one's standing or status within the group. The former represents a loss of innocence; the latter represents a loss of face.

Guilt leaves us with an internal sense of moral failure, even if no one else knows about our transgression. One can sense guilt without the knowledge of "the expressed scorn of other persons."⁸ In contrast, shame leaves us with a sense of humiliation, defeat, and ridicule and is intricately tied to our exposure and loss of honor or status before our peers and those in authority within our social network. Shame is not inherently individualistic or private, but corporate and public; it cannot be experienced apart from the larger social context.

More recent research has been less inclined to accept the "internal-external" distinction unless it is acknowledged that in a shame-based context it is not essential that an observer be physically present, since the notion of a real or imaginary observing external audience is often internalized.⁹ Nevertheless, the comparative value placed on group identity or individual freedom continues to play an important role in the formation of human identity and in social and ethical guidelines.

Significantly, the last few decades of anthropological research have also demonstrated that no known cultures of the world can be spoken of as *exclusively* guilt-based

6. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 223.

7. Lyn Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 80.

8. Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Science Editions, 1961), 21.

9. Millie R. Creighton, "Revisiting Shame and Guilt Cultures: A Forty-Year Pilgrimage," *Ethos* 18, no. 3 (1990): 285. Earlier

anthropologists, such as Julian Pitt-Rivers, argued strongly for the necessity of the "presence of witnesses" in any expression of honor and shame; public knowledge was an "essential ingredient." Later anthropologists modified this by pointing out that in shame-based cultures the perceived attitudes and reactions of the group can be internalized and influence behavior and feelings about one's own reputation. See Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany, 27.

or shame-based. Virtually every culture in the world contains concepts of both guilt and shame, including the pressure to conform to certain group expectations as well as some kind of internalized ideas about what is right or wrong.¹⁰ The difference is not in the absence of either shame or guilt, but rather in how dominant these tendencies are. Furthermore, anthropologists have distanced themselves from some of the earlier attempts that sought to rank guilt as a superior value to shame within various theories of social evolution. Nevertheless, anthropologists continue to find the terms “conceptually distinguishable” because there is a persistent “cultural variation” in the way guilt and shame function as social mechanisms.¹¹ The research and accompanying literature on this theme continues to grow and demonstrates that the distinction between shame and guilt remains helpful in understanding certain cultural dynamics.¹²

The emphasis on the distinction between guilt and shame as a way to better understand cultures began to impact Christian missiology with the 1954 publication of Eugene Nida’s classic *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, where he proposed a cultural analysis scheme that examines cultures in terms of three different reactions to transgressions: fear-based, shame-based, and guilt-based cultures.¹³ Other missiologists (such as Hans Kasdorf, Hannes Wiher, and David Hesselgrave) have popularized these distinctions in their missiological writings.¹⁴

Asian scholar Young Gweon You makes a convincing case that although these tendencies are found around the world, the shame orientation is particularly dominant in Asia. Using Korea as a model shame-based culture, he cites five major reasons why this orientation has become so dominant.¹⁵ First, Koreans have a strong group orientation and “put high value on the harmonious integration of group members.” From the earliest age one’s identity and self-concept is shaped and formed within a strong reference to the larger views and needs of the group (family, clan, and lineage) to which the person belongs. The needs of the group take priority over the needs of the individual.

Second, family dynamics in Korea emphasize the importance of providing an “external authority which is present in every sphere of life.” There is less emphasis on internalizing standards of conduct because the ubiquitous presence of family members embodies that authority. Children look to their parents and elders for counsel and

10. The presence of guilt and shame in all cultural systems also dispels the attempts of early anthropologists to place a value judgment on either shame or guilt as a more effective motivator for guiding ethical behavior, since the two values, though distinct, are inseparably linked to the other.

11. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, “The Social Mechanism of Guilt and Shame: The Japanese Case,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (October 1971): 242.

12. Anthropologists such as J. Pitt-Rivers in *The People of the Sierra* (quoted above) and Douglas Haring advanced the distinction considerably in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1990s the distinction persisted, but has been rearticulated along the lines noted in this chapter. See, for example, Lee, “Korean Culture and Sense of Shame, 181–94,” and Millie Creighton (see footnote 9).

Compare with the earlier research of Douglas Haring, *Personal Character and Cultural Milieu* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1956).

13. Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1954), 150.

14. See Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980), 111–15; David J. Hesselgrave, “Missionary Elencics and Guilt and Shame,” *Missiology* 11, no. 4 (October 1983): 461–83; Hannes Wiher, *Shame and Guilt: A Key to Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Bonn, Germany: Culture and Science, 2003).

15. The five points and the quotations are taken from Young Gweon You, “Shame and Guilt Mechanisms in East Asian Culture,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 58–61.

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guidance, and they experience shame if they fail to meet the obligations expected of them by members of the family.

Third, ancestor veneration (which is reinforced by Confucian ideals) further reinforces the presence of the group, rather than an internalized code of divine law that establishes the rules of proper behavior.

Fourth, Koreans strongly emphasize the importance of maintaining the social status of the group. Any action perceived by the group as bringing disrepute to their social ranking causes them to "lose face" and is a source of great shame. Koreans frequently use expressions such as "saving one's face," "losing one's face," and "maintaining one's face." These expressions refer to the importance of maintaining the honor of the group and avoiding a situation that might bring shame to the larger collective.

Finally, the entire social matrix of Korean culture emphasizes the importance of maintaining the balance in reciprocal obligations. It is expected that in all social interactions there should be a mutual balance between "rights and duties, social assets and liabilities, debt and payment, give and take." When this balance collapses because reciprocity either is ignored or becomes impossible to fulfill, a heightened sense of shame is experienced.

While You uses Korea as a case study, these five dynamics could be applied to much of Asia; moreover, with the exception of his emphasis on ancestor veneration and the lack of a divine code in East Asia, they have also been broadly observed throughout the Islamic world.¹⁶ These observations about the social dynamics that produce a shame-based culture are in contrast to the Western emphasis on individual autonomy. Throughout the social structures of Western societies, individual achievement is rewarded and "standing out" is valued over "blending in." Our culture is full of various proverbs, such as "different strokes for different folks" and "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," which underscore the value of individualism and personal choices and judgments. Even the United States Army, arguably an institution with the greatest need for group coordination and deference to leaders, has used surprisingly individualistic slogans, such as "Be all you can be" and the current slogan, "An Army of One." Contrast this with the well-known Japanese proverb, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down."

In the West, independence, even from an early age, is valued over interdependence. In a highly individualistic culture the ethical values and social mores of the larger society must be reinforced through a process of internalizing codes of conduct so that the reference point is more internal and personal rather than external and public. Parents teach children what is right and wrong and expect that the internalization of those principles and guidelines will serve as a reference point throughout life. Shame-based cultures rely heavily on "public opinion, outward appearances and group pressure to enforce its norms."¹⁷ While these reference points are also present in the West, they are outweighed by the emphasis on individualism and the early development of an internalized sense of

16. Roland Muller, who has spent much of his adult life living in the Islamic world, argues that the emphasis on honor and shame is one of the central values observed throughout the

Islamic world. See his *Honor and Shame*; also Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam*.

17. Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame," 81.

responsibility for one's own actions. E. R. Dodds argues that this is rooted in a change that took place in Graeco-Roman civilization where, to use his words, "you will do it because I say so" gives place to 'you will do it because it is right.'¹⁸

Now that Christianity has emerged as a truly global faith and the majority of Christians are located outside the West, we can no longer afford to ignore the discussion of how the traditional understanding of human sin, our guilt before God as sinners, and the redemptive work of Christ on the cross might be best understood and expressed in a shame-based context. This is an important intersection between anthropology and theology that requires further reflection. Our study will fall into three major sections. First, we will begin by exploring whether the concepts of shame and guilt as outlined above are reflected in the Scriptures themselves. Second, we will seek to apply our findings to systematic theology and determine whether our deepened understanding of human identity in a shame-based culture should influence how we understand and talk about the atonement. Finally, we will seek to demonstrate how the twin values of innocence/guilt and honor/shame relate to one another in positive, constructive ways.

GUILT AND SHAME IN THE SCRIPTURES

The emphasis on guilt in the Western world is often attributed to the presence of Christianity. The overarching authority of the Scriptures and the clear ethical guidelines set forth there, coupled with the judicial language associated with the doctrine of justification, have all helped to emphasize the legal aspect of salvation. Guilt and its corollary, innocence, are essentially legal concepts. As sinners, we have broken God's laws, and the good news of the gospel declares that we have been justified through Christ's atoning work on the cross. Christ paid the penalty for us so that when we stand at the bar of God's judgment seat, we who deserve his condemnation are declared "not guilty."

Popular expositions of the "plan of salvation" such as the Roman Road and the Four Spiritual Laws all emphasize personal guilt and the need for an individual decision to receive Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior.¹⁹ These basic explanations of the gospel have been very fruitful, and I am grateful for the wonderful way God has used both of these plans in personal evangelism. Both of them are based on scriptural passages and are simple enough for any believer to use. The question is whether this basic approach is adequate for evangelism in the Majority World and whether the gospel story can also be approached from a shame perspective, while yet remaining fully scriptural. To answer this question we must explore the biblical evidence for the concept of shame, beginning with the very earliest reference to the entrance of sin into the world, as recorded in Genesis 3.

18. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), 48.

19. The Roman Road refers to a simple explanation of the basic gospel message using texts from Paul's letter to the Romans (using Romans 3:10; 3:23; 6:23; 10:9; and 10:13). *The Four Spirit-*

tual Laws is the popular four-step plan of salvation developed by Bill Bright for the Campus Crusade for Christ. According to Campus Crusade for Christ, *The Four Spiritual Laws* is the most popular tool for personal evangelism in history, currently exceeding 1.5 billion copies.

Biblical Evidence for Honor and Shame in the Old Testament

The Legacy of the Fall: Guilt, Shame, and Fear

In Genesis 2:16 we read that God gave to Adam an explicit command to “not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This command was coupled with a clear warning of divine sanction should he disobey: “for when you eat of it you will surely die.” According to Genesis 3:6 Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. The description that follows demonstrates several consequences of sin, including feelings of guilt, shame, and fear. Adam and Eve knew that they had transgressed an explicit command of God. When challenged by the serpent, Eve was able to recount the command, even though it had been given to Adam before she was created.²⁰ It is clear that both Adam and Eve had internalized the command. Once they disobeyed, Adam and Eve felt guilt because they knew that they had transgressed God’s command.

However, Adam and Eve not only experienced guilt, they also felt shame, as indicated by the realization of their nakedness and their attempts to hide from God. Before the fall, the text had declared, “the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame [בְּרוּשׁ]” (Gen. 2:25). After the fall, the man and woman “realized they were naked . . . and made coverings for themselves” (3:7) and tried to hide from the Lord (3:8).

Finally, when God called to them, we have the first reference in the Bible to fear; Adam said to God, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid” (3:10). The account emphasizes guilt, shame, and fear as three of the consequences of the entrance of sin into the world, and all three can be traced throughout the Scriptures.

This chapter assumes that the reader is acquainted with the emphasis on guilt and divine acquittal or condemnation in the Scriptures, for this well-attested biblical theme has become an integral part of the Western theological tradition. Both the Old and the New Testaments use legal language and even draw on the imagery of a court case and trial to reinforce the idea that sin makes us personally guilty before God and that we will be held legally accountable for our actions.²¹ While affirming the importance of the guilt/innocence (or guilt/forgiveness) emphasis in Scripture and the legal aspects of redemption, recent biblical scholarship has also increasingly recognized the importance of understanding shame/honor as a distinctive category from guilt/innocence.

Terms and Examples of Honor and Shame in the Old Testament

The Old Testament contains at least ten different words, occurring nearly three hundred times, to convey various aspects of shame. These words include “to shame”

20. Eve’s recounting of the prohibition differs only slightly from the original. For example, there is no indication in the original prohibition about touching the fruit, only not eating it. We are left to assume that Adam recounted the prohibition to Eve, although it is possible that God also told Eve this command and it

is simply not recorded in the text. The main point is that it is clear that Eve understands the command and has internalized it.

21. See, for example, the dramatic example of the Lord bringing Israel to court, calling the earth itself as a witness and declaring Israel guilty of breaking the covenant (Mic. 6).

(בוש);²² “scorn, insult, reproach or disgrace” (התפוד);²³ “to publicly humiliate/afflict” (ענה);²⁴ “to be slighted” or “to have no honor or weight” (קלה);²⁵ “to expose nakedness or make naked” (ערה);²⁶ “to be insulted, put to shame, chide” (כלם),²⁷ among others.²⁸ These words are often contrasted with the idea of honor (כבוד), which, with its various cognates, occurs more than one hundred times.

Lyn Bechtel’s “The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel” is one among many studies that have demonstrated the role of shame and honor in the Old Testament.²⁹ Bechtel points out that part of God’s covenantal agreement with Israel was to shame her enemies and to protect his covenantal people from being shamed. The psalmist frequently asks God to shame his enemies: for example: “May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion. . . . May those who say to me, ‘Aha! Aha!’ be appalled at their own shame” (Ps. 40:14–15).³⁰ The psalmist worships Yahweh for shaming Israel’s enemies: “He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame” (Ps. 78:66). Yahweh even shames other gods when their followers claim their god had a position of higher rank, power, or status than Yahweh.

The public shaming of other gods was also common in the ancient world. Assyria, for example, often captured the idols of opposing nations and “set them in a public place in a position of submission before the Assyrian high god, Ashur.”³¹ The entire ritual was designed to emphasize the honor of the superior god and to expose to public shame the vanquished god as a sign of inferiority.

22. Root, “to blush, to come to shame”; in Hiphil form, “to act shamefully, cover in shame” (Ps. 89:45) or “put to shame/humiliate” (2 Sam. 19:5). See Benjamin Davies, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Boston: Bradley & Co., 1879), 83 (hereafter referred to as *HCL*). See also בִּשְׁנָה (“ashamed,” Hos. 10:6); see L. H. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999), 117. Hereafter referred to as *HALOT*.

23. For example, Gen. 34:14 (for an Israelite to give his sister to the uncircumcised for marriage causes shame and reproach); Ps. 15:3 (a righteous man does not shame his neighbor); 22:6 (“I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people,” foreshadowing Jesus’ shame on the cross); 69:6–9 (the psalmist does not want to bring shame to the people of God, nor does he want his enemies’ shame to fall on him). See *HCL*, 233; *HALOT*, 356.

24. See, for example, Deut. 26:6, where it is used to describe the Egyptian humiliation of the Hebrew slaves. See *HCL*, 82–83, especially in the Piel; *HALOT*, 853.

25. To be honored is to have “weight” (כבוד), so to be dishonored is to be “light” (קלה). In its Piel construction it carries the idea of honor. Thus, to be considered “light” is to have no honor (Job 16:10; Ps. 15:3; 22:6; 69:7, 10). See F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, ed., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957 [1907]), 457 (hereafter *BDB*). In the Niphal form it can mean “to be slighted or despised”; in the Hiphil, “to hold despicable.” See *HCL*, 561–62;

HALOT, 1102, “to shame.”

26. Gamberoni provides an excellent discussion on the extended and figurative meaning of being clothed (לבוש) and unclothed. See Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 7:461–68. See also *HCL*, 490–91 in Piel, Hiphil, and Hithpael forms (Lev. 20:18–21; Lam. 4:21); *HALOT*, 882.

27. *HCL*, 297–98. In Niphal “to be insulted,” as when Hanun shaved off half the beards and cut off the clothing of David’s delegation (2 Sam. 10:5). In Hiphil, הִכְלִיִּם means “to reproach” (Job 19:3); “to put to shame” (Ps. 44:9); “to put on shame as a garment” (Ps. 109:29). See also *HALOT*, 480.

28. There are many positive words that, when negated or used in special constructions, are translated as “shame.” For example, הלל (“shine, bright,” in Piel, “to sing praises”) in the Pual can be used in negation as “to put to shame” (Job 12:17).

29. Bechtel, “The Perception of Shame,” 79–92. See also Gary Stansell, “Honor and Shame in the David Narratives,” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 55–79; Ronald Simkins, “Return to Yahweh: Honor and Shame in Joel,” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 41–54; idem, “Honor and Shame in Genesis 34 and 1 Samuel 25,” in *Teaching the Bible*, ed. Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 104–6; Dianne Bergant, “My Beloved Is Mine and I Am His” (Song 2:16): The Song of Songs and Honor and Shame,” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 23–40.

30. See also Ps. 6:10; 53:5; 57:3; 70:2; 71:13, 24; 78:66; 83:16–17; 109:28–29.

31. Bechtel, “The Perception of Shame,” 89.

When the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines and brought into the temple of Dagon, it was a deliberate act intending to shame and humiliate Yahweh and all Israel. In reply, Yahweh shamed Dagon by causing him to lie prostrate and face down, bowing before Yahweh. The Philistines set Dagon back in his place, but the next morning they discovered Dagon "fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold" (1 Sam. 5:3-4). Dagon's head and hands were cut off because "the head was a symbol of superiority and the palms of the hands a symbol of physical power."³² To lose one's head is the ultimate humiliation and shame, and to lose one's hands is a sign of the loss of power.³³

According to 2 Kings 18, Sennacherib's delegation, sent to force Israel's surrender, publicly taunted Yahweh in the hearing of the people and declared that Israel's god had no more power to deliver them than the gods of the other vanquished nations (18:33-35). In reply, Hezekiah cried out to Yahweh saying, "Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult/shame/reproach [הַרְרָה] the living God" (19:16). When Yahweh defended his honor by annihilating the Assyrian forces, the Assyrian king "withdrew to his own land in disgrace" and was murdered by his own sons in the temple of his god (2 Chron. 32:21). The whole account is couched in the language of honor and shame. Assyria sought to shame Yahweh, but God's power and greatness was vindicated; therefore his public honor and reputation were upheld and Assyria was publicly shamed.

In the prophetic tradition, Zion's future glory is characterized as the end of shame and the joy of being honored by Yahweh. For example, Isaiah declares, "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood" (Isa. 54:4).

Another important feature of shame and honor, which can be traced back to the account of the fall in Genesis, is the association of nakedness with shame and the corresponding association of clothing with honor. Jacob honored Joseph by clothing him with the richly ornamented robe (Gen. 37:3). Yahweh honored the priestly office by giving the priests elaborately embroidered garments (Ex. 28:1-43). In Esther, when King Xerxes asked his official Haman what should be done to honor someone who delights the king, Haman answered that he should be clothed with the king's royal robe. Haman foolishly thought he was the one the king was going to honor, but he ended up being publicly shamed by having to put the king's robe on his Jewish enemy, Mordecai, and then placing him on a horse and leading him through the city proclaiming, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor" (Est. 6:11).

32. Ibid., 92.

33. This also helps to explain why terrorists who are up against a vastly superior military power will sometimes resort to kidnappings, followed by publicly (via television) beheading the

person. It is intended to publicly shame the greater power. This is also why even a military defeat can be regarded as a victory, as long as it is publicly understood that the defeat was in the cause of defending the honor of the country.

This custom explains why the prophets portray God as wearing a great robe. When Isaiah saw the Lord on a high throne, "the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). To express public shame and humiliation in the Old Testament, people tore their clothes (Gen. 37:34; 44:13; Num. 14:6; Josh. 7:6; 2 Sam. 13:31; 2 Kings 22:11).

King David's wife Michal misinterpreted David's disrobing himself and dancing before the Lord as an act of public shame. However, David's reply indicates that he did not view it as shameful since it was done "before the LORD" (see 2 Sam. 6:20–22), whose honor is beyond challenge. If, however, David had disrobed himself and danced primarily before the public (which is how Michal interpreted it), that would have, indeed, brought shame to David's public reputation. Many other examples from the Old Testament could be shown to demonstrate that public, external shame is a distinct category from guilt.³⁴

Biblical Evidence for Honor and Shame in the New Testament

The Gospels

In the first century, Greeks, Romans, and Jews all highly valued public honor and status. Likewise, the avoidance of public shame was crucial. Honor was frequently attached to one's birth, family name, appointment to an important office, physical prowess, or military success. But the most common way to acquire honor was "in the face-to-face game of challenge and riposte," which was an integral part of daily life.³⁵ If the honor of one's name or family was offended, it was accepted that such honor could be restored only through the shedding of blood.

According to anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, honor "provides a nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in the individual through his [or her] aspiration to personify them."³⁶ 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 a 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 clothed if one's honor is to be preserved.³⁷

In recent years New Testament studies have benefited from biblical scholars who have highlighted the role of honor and shame in the Scriptures. Bruce Malina's *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* and Jerome Neyrey's *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* are excellent examples of how the cultural associations of honor and shame in the Mediterranean world play an important part in understanding the New Testament. In the New Testament, as well as in the LXX, the most prominent

34. When Absalom slept with King David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel," the text does not emphasize his guilt because of unlawful sexual intercourse, but the way this act publicly shamed his father (2 Sam. 12:11; 16:21–22). When the Ammonites wanted to humiliate David, they seized David's men and "shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle of the buttocks, and sent them away" (2 Sam. 10:4). These are all illustrative more of honor/shame than guilt/innocence.

35. Jerome H. Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 116.

36. Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 22.

37. *Ibid.*, 116–17. See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 115.

word for "shame" is αἰσχύνη.³⁸ There are six other Greek roots that are often translated as shame, including ἀτιμία ("dishonor, lacking honor, disgrace") and the verb ἐντρέπω ("to shame, show no honor").

To honor (τιμάω) someone is to give them public recognition, whereas to shame (αἰσχύνω) someone means a loss of respect or reputation and often involves some kind of public censure. Neyrey argues that many of the parables cannot be properly understood apart from notions of public shame, which are quite different from judicial or internalized conceptions of guilt.³⁹ For example, Jesus employs the social usage of someone experiencing shame in the parable of the dishonest, but shrewd, manager, who acknowledges that he is too ashamed (αἰσχύνω) to beg (Luke 16:3), or the person takes the seat of honor at a wedding feast only to be asked to suffer the humiliation and public shame of being moved to the lowest place because a more distinguished guest has arrived (Luke 14:7–11).

This latter passage is particularly significant because Jesus deliberately contrasts the two values of shame and honor in his exposition of the parable. In a powerful foreshadowing of the cross, Jesus tells his disciples to act like servants and take the lowliest seat in the house, and then, when the host arrives, he will publicly show honor by moving them to a higher place. Then, Jesus concludes, "you will be honored [lit., there will be glory, δόξα, to you] in the presence of all your fellow guests" (Luke 14:10).

One of the best illustrations of the dynamics of shame and honor in the parables of Jesus is found in the parable of the two sons asked by their father to work in the vineyard (Matt. 21:28–32). The first adamantly refused, but later changed his mind and went. The second son agreed to work, but never actually did. Most Western readers do not sense the real tension in the story. Certainly the first son, who refused to work but eventually did, is being honored by Jesus and compared with the tax collectors and sinners who initially refused to honor God, but were now repenting and entering the kingdom. Western readers find Jesus' question patently obvious and the whole construction seems to lack the tension that is so often present in parables.

However, the tension of this parable is felt when heard within the context of a shame-based culture. From an honor and shame perspective, the son who publicly agreed to work is actually better than the son who publicly shamed his father by refusing to work and telling him that to his face. Even though the one who refused to work later changed his mind and worked while the former never actually obeyed the father, the public shaming of the father is still a greater sin than not performing the task.⁴⁰ The first son may have eventually obeyed the father, but the father lost face. The second son may have not obeyed the father, but he protected the father's public honor.

In the teaching of Jesus, both guilt and shame play important roles in understanding how we are affected by sin. Conversely, both forgiveness and honor occupy central roles in understanding the nature of God's gracious work in our lives. The parable of

38. In the LXX it is used most often to translate the verb בָּשָׁם ("to be ashamed") and the noun בִּשְׁמוֹ ("shame").

39. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998). See,

for example, the man without the wedding garment (Matt. 22:11–15), the wicked servant (24:51), or the unprepared virgins (25:12).

40. *Ibid.*, 31.

the prodigal son is not only about the son's receiving forgiveness for his incurred guilt (Luke 15:18, 21), but also about his shame being taken away and his being restored to a place of honor as a son. The son sought forgiveness for his guilt by confessing his sin and asking to be made like a hired servant. The father could have forgiven his son, cleansed him of any guilt, and then made him like one of his hired servants. However, the father not only forgave him for his sins, but also restored him to the place of honor as a son by kissing his face (15:20), clothing him with a robe, and putting a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet (15:22). He honored him further by ordering that the fattened calf be killed and a great celebration be held in his son's honor (15:23). The text does not indicate that the older son was angry because the father forgave his younger brother. The actual wording of the text makes it clear that he was angry because his younger brother had been shown honor, despite his having brought shame on the family, while he who had never brought shame on the family had never been so honored (15:28–31).

Pauline Usage

The apostle Paul uses the term *shame* in the broad, common sense of the word when he shames the Corinthians for having people in their midst who are apparently ignorant of the gospel. [Paul declares, "I say this to your shame [ἐντροπή]" (1 Cor. 15:34). He even encourages the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 3:14) to not associate with those who refuse to obey his instruction, "that he may feel ashamed [ἐντρέπω]."

The verb *καταισχύνω* conveys the action "to shame, to bring to shame." In its most common usage, God acts as the subject in bringing shame through his righteous judgment.⁴¹ [Paul understands the incarnation as the way in which God shames the unbelieving world by demonstrating the wisdom of his "foolishness" and the strength of his "weakness." First Corinthians 1:27 declares that God chooses the foolish things of this world in order to shame the wise.] He takes the weak things of this world in order to shame the strong. The incarnation sets God's "great reversal" into motion: those who are first (the place of honor) will be last (the place of shame), and those who are last will be made first (cf. Matt. 20:16). The "great reversal" continues at the cross. [At the very hour of Jesus' public shame on the cross, he was actually in the process of shaming his enemies, disarming the powers and authorities and making "a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).] With these new eschatological realities breaking in on the present order, the only remaining "glory" (δόξα) of the world, Paul declares, "is in their shame [αἰσχύνη]" (Phil. 3:19).⁴²

It is with some irony that these words to the Philippians were written by Paul while in prison. Paul recognizes that his current position as a prisoner of Rome will be perceived by the social world of the first century as shameful. But he anticipates his deliverance and, in Philippians 1:20, he expresses his hope that he "will in no way be ashamed [αἰσχύνω]." [First-century Christians were seen to share in the same shame as those captured in Roman military campaigns and paraded through the streets and exposed

41. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. F. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:189.

42. Jude 1:13 describes the rebellious world as "wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame [αἰσχύνη]."

to public humiliation. However, Paul declares that before God we are actually being "led in triumphal procession in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14) and what appears to be the "smell of death" is actually the "fragrance of life" (2 Cor. 2:16). Likewise, the apostle John, despite his current trials and public exile, anticipates the day when Christ appears and we will "be confident and unashamed [μη̄ αἰσχυνθῶμεν] before him" (1 John 2:28). When Paul and John speak of not being ashamed or of being unashamed, they mean something far more significant than a vague notion of not being embarrassed by the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8; 1:12). They realize that in the present age the gospel appears shameful because they worship a crucified Savior (1 Cor. 1:18) and they are being persecuted and imprisoned (2 Tim 1:16). However, Paul confidently declares, "I am not ashamed (ἐπαισχύνομαι of the gospel)" (Rom 1:16). For him, this is an eschatological statement that Jesus has already borne our future penalty and our shame, and that the future glory and honor of our state is already being celebrated in the midst of the present evil age.]

Theology of the Cross in a Shame-Based Context

From this biblical study, we can now focus on how people from shame-based cultures might understand the atonement differently than the classical Western formulations. Therefore, we must now return to the Gospels and reflect on the dynamics of guilt and shame in the crucifixion of Christ and within the larger context of the passion.

One of the opening scenes in Christ's passion is his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. A capture and arrest is an obvious form of public shaming and loss of honor. Interestingly, the text in various ways underscores that even though Jesus accepted this shame, it did not involve an *actual* loss of honor. Jesus stands up and exhibits control of the situation, giving directions to the Roman soldiers (John 18:8), acknowledging that this arrest took place to fulfill Scripture (Matt. 26:54, 56), healing the man's ear (Luke 22:51), and even causing the soldiers to draw back and fall to the ground while Jesus remained standing (John 18:5).

The arrest is followed by a Roman trial. A trial is a classic challenge to someone's honor since it is so closely involved with all the key elements of honor, such as one's name and reputation in the community. In the ancient world there was no legal presumption of innocence until proved guilty (John 18:30). Nevertheless, Jesus' trial has a clear forensic element whereby charges are brought forward, the accused is given the opportunity to respond, and the interrogator evaluates the two arguments. The trial and public flogging of Jesus contains a rich deposit of material that plays heavily on the ideas of rank and honor, challenge and riposte, especially in the interchange about Jesus' title ("King of the Jews"), the reference to his kingdom being from "another place," and his statement, "everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:33, 36–38).⁴³

A crucifixion involves several parts, including the scourge, carrying the beam to the place of execution and, finally, the agonizingly slow death after being impaled on the beams. The scourge has all the elements of public shaming that we have examined

43. For a more detailed examination of this, see Neyrey, "Johannine Passion Narrative," 118–32. See also Martin Hengel, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Crucifixion in the Ancient World (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

so far. Jesus is stripped naked, his hands are bound, and he is publicly beaten, including spitting and repeatedly striking the head (Matt. 27:30). All the features of honor are brought forward in a mock coronation ritual ceremony, adding to the humiliation and shame. Jesus is given a crown of thorns for his head, a purple robe to wear, they shout “Hail, king of the Jews” as they strike him (27:29), and they mockingly bend their knees and bow to him. Everything is done to maximize the shame.

The act of carrying one’s own beam to the place of execution is a form of shaming, especially since it is carried publicly through the streets and the criminal is taunted along the way by the crowds. The Scriptures emphasize that Jesus is forced to carry the cross (John 19:17), and considerable attention is given to the fact that he is publicly mocked and taunted by several different groups of people (Matt. 27:38–43; Mark 15:27–32; Luke 23:35–39). Ancient crucifixions took place in public (John 19:20), which increased the shame because the criminal was nailed to the beam and exposed naked. This is emphasized in the scriptural account, which records that Jesus is nailed to the cross and placed between two criminals. Then the soldiers take his clothes, possibly even his undergarments, and divide them among one another (John 19:23), an act explicitly mentioned as a fulfillment of Psalm 22. We should recall that the vocabulary of shame is integral to Psalm 22, which foreshadows his humiliation:

They cried to you and were saved;
 in you they trusted and were not disappointed [בוֹשׁ, shamed].
 But I am a worm and not a man,
 scorned [חִרְפַּת] by men and despised [בוֹזָה] by the people.
 All who see me mock me [לַעֲג];
 they hurl insults, shaking their heads. . . .
 Dogs have surrounded me;
 a band of evil men has encircled me,
 they have pierced my hands and my feet.
 I can count all my bones;
 people stare and gloat over me.
 They divide my garments among them
 and cast lots for my clothing. (Ps. 22:5–7, 16–18)

As noted earlier, all the Gospel writers portray the full shame of Jesus’ passion, but find subtle ways to make it clear that even in the midst of his public shaming, Jesus was, in fact, a person of the greatest honor. John is the most explicit as he records that even while on the cross Jesus demonstrated his true honor. He records Jesus’ fulfilling one of the most important duties in a shame-based culture, namely, the responsibility of the eldest son to care for his mother. So, in the midst of Jesus’ being publicly shamed, he makes the honorable arrangements with John to care for his mother, a provision that also serves to shield his mother from shame and to preserve her honor (John 19:27).⁴⁴

44. Neyrey, “Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” 131.

John is also the one who prepares the reader by placing the account of this public, seemingly ignominious, death of Jesus in perspective by recording Jesus' words about his life prior to the passion: "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (10:18).

The resurrection is, of course, the great vindication that he who had been treated so shamefully was, in fact, the eternal Son of God and has been "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9). The resurrection overturns the shame, and Jesus is restored to his former position of honor at the Father's right hand. The book of Revelation repeatedly uses the language of honor to describe Jesus Christ (Rev. 4:9, 11; 5:11–12; 7:12), finally culminating in all the glory and honor of the nations being brought to Jesus Christ in the new Jerusalem (21:25).

Even this cursory overview of the passion has demonstrated that crucifixion was deliberately designed to maximize the public shame along with the execution. In the cross Jesus bore the shame of our sins as well as our guilt. A mere execution would have atoned for guilt, but not for the shame. As sinners, the most profound shame is that of being publicly separated and judged by God. Jesus bears this judgment throughout his passion and death. Through his resurrection, we have victory not only over the condemnation we deserve at the bar of God's justice, but also the public shame of being disgraced before the world as those who are under God's curse. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame [αἰσχύνῃ], and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus bore our shame as well as our guilt. Undoubtedly, his death accomplished a forensic act such that we who had been declared "guilty" are now declared "not guilty." The forensic aspect of the cross is clearly taught in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's letters. But the cross was also a public, social deliverance. Just as the Hebrew slaves publicly shamed Pharaoh and his mighty army when they crossed the Red Sea, so the cross of Christ was a public shaming of Satan and the principalities and powers allied with him. Satan was publicly shamed by Christ when the Lord Jesus "disarmed the powers and authorities" and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). Through the resurrection, we who were the bearers of guilt and shame are now declared to be the recipients of justification and honor. Jesus now sits in honor, exalted at the right hand of God the Father.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATONEMENT

The second part of this study seeks to apply these biblical reflections to systematic theology and determine whether our deepened understanding of human identity in a shame-based culture should influence how we understand and talk about the atonement. Since Western systematic theology has been almost exclusively written by theologians from cultures framed primarily by the values of guilt and innocence, there has been a corresponding failure to fully appreciate the importance of the pivotal values of honor and shame in understanding Scripture and the doctrine of sin. Even with the publication of important works such as *Biblical Social Values and Their*

Meaning and The New Testament World, systematic theologies have remained largely unchanged by this research.⁴⁵

Bruce Nicholls, the founder of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, has acknowledged this problem, noting that Christian theologians have “rarely if ever stressed salvation as honoring God, exposure of sin as shame, and the need for acceptance and the restoration of honor.”⁴⁶ In fact, a survey of all of the leading textbooks used in teaching systematic theology across the major theological traditions reveals that although the indexes are filled with references to guilt, the word “shame” appears in the index of only one of these textbooks.⁴⁷ This omission continues to persist despite the fact that the term *guilt* and its various derivatives occur 145 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament, whereas the term *shame* and its derivatives occur nearly 300 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New Testament.⁴⁸

This is clearly an area where systematic theology must be challenged to reflect more adequately the testimony of Scripture. I am confident that a more biblical understanding of human identity outside of Christ that is framed by guilt, fear, and shame will, in turn, stimulate a more profound and comprehensive appreciation for the work of Christ on the cross. This approach will also greatly help peoples in the Majority World to understand the significance and power of Christ’s work, which has heretofore been told primarily from only one perspective.

Traditional Understandings of the Atonement

I have chosen the atonement as the application of this study on anthropology because, for the Christian, the work of Christ on the cross is the most fundamental place where our new identity is formed. In Adam we became identified with guilt, fear, and shame. In Christ we are now identified with forgiveness, confidence, and honor. The apostle Paul uses the expression “in Christ” or close equivalents (e.g., “in him”) 165 times in his letters. He declares, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). For Paul the cross is the place where our new identity is formed; it is the great intersection between anthropology and theology.

45. See Joseph Plevnik, “Honor/Shame,” in John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 95–104. See also chapter 2 of Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 28–62.

46. See Joseph Plevnik, “Honor/Shame,” in John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 95–104. See also chapter 2 of Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 28–62.

47. Bruce Nicholls, “The Role of Shame and Guilt in a Theology of Cross-Cultural Mission,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25, no. 3 (2001): 232.

48. See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1941); Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Alan Gomes, ed., *Dogmatic Theology by William G. T. Shedd*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003); Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1–3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–1997); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1995); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). The only systematic theology I found with a reference to shame is a single line in volume 3 of Norman Geisler’s *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2002–), which acknowledges that Adam’s sin “brought on him guilt, as well as the shame he expressed in view of it” (Gen. 3:7).

48. Nicholls, “The Role of Shame and Guilt,” 235.

Theologians throughout history have offered an impressive range of theories to help Christians better understand Christ's work on the cross. They have drawn from a wide range of biblical words and metaphors that seek to understand the meaning of Christ's death. The more important metaphors include sacrifice, propitiation, justification, substitution, redemption, ransom, and reconciliation. Some of these themes, such as sacrifice, draw their primary inspiration from seeing Christ as fulfilling the Old Testament. Other themes, such as justification and substitution, focus on the righteousness of God and/or the sinfulness of humanity, which, by moral necessity, required the death of Christ if communion with God was to be restored. Other images, such as ransom, celebrate Christ's victory over Satan.

In the Middle Ages, theories concerning the work of Christ became more theologically sophisticated and were classified as "*objective* theories, which find the necessity for Jesus' death in the nature or functions of God, and the *subjective* theories, which find the necessity for Jesus' death in the situation of human beings."⁴⁹ Some of the better-known theories of the atonement include Anselm of Canterbury's satisfaction theory, John Calvin's penal substitution theory, Hugo Grotius's governmental theory, Augustus Strong's eternal atonement theory, and Peter Abelard's moral influence theory.⁵⁰

The writings on this topic are so abundant that even a cursory survey would lead us too far astray. The point to recognize is that although these various theories of atonement are all important, we should not think that any one of them, or even all of them together, somehow exhaust the full meaning and significance of the biblical doctrine. The role of honor/shame, for example, is not emphasized in any of the well-known theories of atonement. In contrast, the role of guilt plays a prominent role in many of these theories.

There is, of course, an ongoing need for a strong emphasis on human guilt and the corresponding forgiveness that occurs through the work of Christ on the cross. Guilt is an objective result of sin. Louis Berkhof defines guilt as "the state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment for the violation of a law or a moral requirement."⁵¹ Central to biblical teaching regarding salvation from sin is that in Christ we have been justified. Through his work on the cross, we have been acquitted from guilt and punitive liability. The emphasis on guilt is central to the biblical message and cannot be lost. It should always be integral to how the gospel is proclaimed and received by people groups around the world.

The point that the present study seeks to advance is that while the cross is never less than a judicial act, it is certainly much *more* than a judicial act. In other words, even though as sinners the statement "we are guilty" is perfectly true, our identity as sinners transcends that particular statement. The work of Christ on the cross provides a more comprehensive response to human alienation than is sometimes reflected in our studies on the atonement. This is particularly true because the West has often understood guilt in personal, private terms. The result is that the public, social aspects of what Christ did on the cross are sometimes overlooked.

49. Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:21.

vol. 2, chs. 46-48.

50. For a survey of the major theories of atonement, see *ibid.*,

51. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 232.

The goal of this section is not to uproot any particular cherished theories of the atonement but rather to explore how the role of shame and honor in the work of Christ needs to be more deeply understood and carefully highlighted in global contexts where human identity is strongly shaped by the values of honor and shame. There are several important contributions to theology that a view of the atonement emphasizing Christ's work in bearing our shame and restoring our honor before God might make. As noted earlier, these contributions influence not only our ability to understand and communicate a deeper understanding of Christ's work, but also how this good news may be better received in cultural contexts where these values are so pervasive. Three contributions will be highlighted.

Contributions of an Emphasis on Honor and Shame

Public Nature of Atonement

First, the emphasis on shame and honor highlights the *public* aspect of Christ's work. Why is this important? Does it really matter whether or not Jesus died and rose again privately or publicly? Many of the best-known understandings of the atonement convey the idea that the most meaningful aspects of Christ's death were being transacted on some distant transcendent stage behind the "veil of tears." However, from the perspective of honor and shame, the public nature of the atonement is actually important. As we have explored, one of the distinctive features of a shame-based culture is that honor and shame are related to the group and these values are, for the most part, lived out and defended in the public arena. In other words, honor and shame are public values and are external, whereas guilt and innocence are more naturally thought of in private terms and tend to be interiorized.

In a normal honor and shame context, if a person of greater honor is shamed by someone of a significantly lower status, the offended party has the right to unleash public punishment on those who have offended their honor. As noted earlier, this response often involved shedding the blood of the offender.⁵² The punishment must take place publicly, or at least become widely known by the larger group. Only then can the honor of the one who was offended be restored.

As sinners, we have dishonored God and brought shame on ourselves by publicly spurning his gracious call for us to live in intimate communion with him. God's holiness requires that his honor be publicly defended and that our corresponding shame be publicly exposed. Immediately after the initial human rebellion, God responds by confronting Adam and Eve and announcing his righteous judgment against them and against the human race. Adam and Eve are publicly exposed as sinners and thereafter feel the crushing burden of sin, including guilt, fear, and shame. However, the Scripture records, quite unexpectedly, that immediately after God's public judgment on Adam and Eve, he extends grace to them by making garments of skin and clothing them (Gen. 3:21).⁵³ As noted earlier, clothing someone is a symbol of bestowing honor.

52. In certain cases when an honorable person is shamed by someone who is significantly below their social status, they may choose to ignore the offense lest they bring some dignity to the

offender just by responding to them.

53. The *NIV Study Bible* comments, "God graciously provided Adam and Eve with more effective clothing to cover their shame."

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This incident is, of course, the first of many examples of the intricate interweaving of God's judgment and grace in Scripture. However, these great themes of judgment and grace all meet in the cross of Jesus Christ. In the mystery of the Christian gospel, rather than God punishing us as we deserve, Christ bears the judgment of God on our behalf and publicly bears our shame. He could have demanded the shedding of our blood to satisfy his honor (Heb. 9:22). Instead, on the cross, he publicly bears our shame and sheds his blood on our behalf. Later, in the resurrection, the full glory and honor of God in Christ is revealed and made publicly manifest (1 Cor. 15:4-8).⁵⁴

According to the protocols of an honor and shame culture, it is essential that honor be restored in a public manner. As we have seen throughout this study, to have honor is to have "publicly acknowledged worth."⁵⁵ If it is not demonstrated publicly, there is no basis for declaring that one's honor has been truly satisfied. A survey of traditional systematic theologies reveals no proper emphasis on the public aspect of Christ's work. Yet the scriptural language makes it clear that the work of Christ in bearing our sins and his glorious victory over death represents, among other things, a public declaration of God's honor before the peoples of the world as well as the hosts of evil whom "he made a public spectacle" (Col. 2:15).

Furthermore, his triumph over the scorn, humiliation, shame, and death that he suffered on the cross is publicly declared through the resurrection. The public nature of his victory will be made fully manifest in the eschaton, when there will be universal acknowledgment of Christ's honor, glory, and power: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor [τιμη] and glory [δοξα] and power, for ever and ever!'" (Rev. 5:13).

Social and Relational Aspect of Atonement

Second, the emphasis on shame and honor underscores the social and relational aspect of Christ's work. Scholars such as J. G. Peristiany and Bruce Malina have made a convincing case that the first-century Mediterranean world was dyadistic rather than individualistic.⁵⁶ In other words, in that setting one's identity is formed by the group one belongs to and by the larger social context within which one lives. Malina argues that in the social world of early Christianity one's personality is linked to what he calls "group embeddedness."⁵⁷ This means that one's self-image is formed in terms

54. Ironically, the redeemed community who follow Christ become subject to the world's shame. Hebrews declares, "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great context in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated" (Heb. 10:32-33).

55. Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," 96.

56. Bruce Malina, "The Individual and the Community: Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (July 1979): 127-28.

57. *Ibid.*, 129. This also helps us to understand what Paul means when he quotes the proverb, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons," and adds, "This testimony is true" (Titus 1:12-13a). In an individualistic culture this strikes us as a shocking example of crass stereotyping. However, in a dyadistic context Paul is merely acknowledging that this is the overall identity of the group. This does not deny that there may be a few outstanding Cretans with noble characters who live honorable lives. The point is that even if such outstanding Cretans existed, their reputation is still linked to the overall identity of the group.

of how one is regarded by the group. In a dyadistic culture, there is a powerful social mechanism whereby you are dependent on others for your psychological existence and feel shame if the image (or projected image) of yourself does not agree with the image shared and believed by others.⁵⁸

This principle has important implications for what it means to see ourselves as sinners. In a pure individualistic guilt context, being a sinner means that we have individually transgressed God's law and therefore stand guilty before God's bar of justice. Our identity is not embedded in the group and so we think of ourselves as standing alone before God. In a pure dyadistic shame context, being a sinner means that we are collectively embedded as members of a race who together stand ashamed before God because we have corporately robbed God of his honor. We are embedded in a sinful race and stand as a race before God.

Shame-based, dyadistic cultures do not have any serious difficulty accepting our collective condemnation through Adam (Rom. 5:12–19). The Scriptures teach that in Adam, as well as through our own willful sinning, the whole human race has dishonored God. We are not merely individually or privately guilty before God. We are also corporate participants in a race that has robbed God of the honor due him. This is why Paul declares such truths as "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22) or "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18).

In the contemporary West, our understanding of human guilt and salvation has, at times, become so hyperprivatized that our connectedness to the larger fallen race has become blurred. This, in turn, opens the door to the ancient Pelagian heresy that falsely understood that the human race stands condemned only because of the universal accumulation of endless individual acts of transgression. In Pelagianism, there is no recognition of the sin nature, only of the particular sinful deeds individuals have committed.⁵⁹ Shame-based cultures are not as vulnerable to Pelagianism, which, ultimately, spawns an inadequate view of both the depth of human sin and the height of divine grace. Dyadistic cultures can also more readily appreciate the beauty and power of what it means for the redeemed community to be found collectively "in Christ."

The collective, social emphasis in shame-based cultures also helps in our understanding of the atonement by revealing the inherent limitations of approaching Christ's work solely in judicial terms. From a purely legal perspective, a judge does not have a *necessary* relationship with those over whom he or she presides. Judges often declare someone guilty of a crime without personally knowing the defendant. It is simply a matter of determining the facts of the case and applying the relevant laws. In fact, personal intimacy between the judge and a defendant is considered deleterious to justice and the pursuit of impartiality. If a judge has any personal involvement or intimacy with someone who is to be judged, it is the responsibility of the judge to dismiss himself from the case.

This is, of course, neither possible nor necessary in the case of divine justice, since God is intimately acquainted with every person who stands before him and yet remains

58. *Ibid.*, 128.

59. Pelagianism, named after the British monk Pelagius,

was condemned at the Synod of Carthage in 418 and later at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

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untainted by any partiality (Rom. 2:11). Nevertheless, there is no *necessary* social relationship involved in the administration of justice. Legal actions are taken almost every day by judges and members of Congress even though they have never even met vast numbers of the very people who will be directly influenced by their decisions.

In contrast, shame does involve a necessary *social* relationship between various parties. Shame-based cultures often think about sin primarily in social rather than private contexts. This explains why Western missionaries working in shame-based cultures have often been perplexed when they discovered that personal sins were not ranked as grievous as social, corporate sins. For example, Wayne Dye, who served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, observed that the Bahinemo people did not feel acute guilt about things like polygamy, betel nut chewing, or smoking, whereas they were deeply troubled by actions that caused discord in the village such as disobedience to husbands and parents, refusing hospitality to someone, or ignoring an expected interclan payment.⁶⁰ In these contexts sinning is viewed more relationally. Sin is, of course, both personal and relational. The difference is in the existential awareness of sin by people from different cultures. Although every culture has its own hamartiological blind spots, it seems clear that as we become more active listeners at the table of global Christianity, Christians from different parts of the world can help to expose each other's blind spots.

The great contribution from shame-based cultures seems to be the reminder that the legacy of sin is far more than the objective guilt we incur because of the transgression of specific commands. We have dishonored the Triune God, brought shame on ourselves, and caused a breach in the divine-human relationship. As we become aware of God's righteousness and our sinfulness, it should be experienced not only as an internal realization of guilt, but also as an increased awareness that we collectively stand ashamed before God. In other words, God's righteousness not only declares us forensically guilty, it also places us as relationally distant and shamed before the presence of the Triune God. It is not just his Word that condemns us; it is his Triune person who shames us.

Process of Christian Conversion (Application of the Atonement)

Third, because shame-based cultures are group-oriented, the process of Christian conversion may be different from what we are accustomed to in the West. In these settings, converting to Christianity may be perceived to bring shame on the family, the extended social network, and even their identity as a people. The good news of what Christ has done on the cross is heard as bad news because of the accompanying social upheaval and disruption that acceptance of this message brings. For example, the vast majority of Muslims believe that if a Muslim converts to Christianity, it brings shame not only to his or her entire family, but on the entire Islamic religion. This is why so many Islamic countries consider conversion a capital offense, punishable by beating, imprisonment, or even death.

60. T. Wayne Dye, "Toward a Cross-Cultural Definition of Sin," *Missiology* 4, no. 1 (January 1976): 28-29.

Missionaries who have worked in shame-based cultures frequently observe that the reason most Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists resist becoming Christians is not primarily because of specific theological objections to the Christian message. More often, there are powerful social and cultural forces that serve as the primary barrier to Christian conversion. People in a shame-based culture are more acutely aware of the surrounding opinions of the group and are constrained from taking individual action in isolation from the larger group. Our frame of reference is apologetically focused on convincing individual Muslims of the truth of Christianity. However, the major barrier is actually not theological or doctrinal, but social, cultural, and relational.⁶¹ This larger issue is often ignored completely.

I do not mean to convey the idea that people from shame-based contexts should never be put in a situation where they are forced to sever their family and social ties and follow Christ. Certainly the message of the cross will always be a stumbling block, and Jesus repeatedly calls us to take drastic action to escape the condemnation of the world (Luke 16:1–8; 1 Cor. 1:18–25). We are exhorted to seek first the kingdom of God and to recognize that following Christ takes final priority over all other obligations, including one's own family and nation (Matt. 10:35–37; Luke 9:59–62). Nevertheless, we should rejoice when an entire family or tribe or even an entire people group comes to Christ.

The New Testament contains several examples of exhortations for entire households to be saved and, subsequently, the conversion and baptism of entire families and groups (Acts 11:14; 16:15, 34; 18:8). The households of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and Crispus probably represent not only the immediate families, but also the servants and other individuals who may have been employed under their authority. This picture creates a sense of discomfort for some Western evangelical readers who want to be assured that each person has individually repented of their sins and received Christ into their lives. This discomfort is related, at least in part, to our tendency to focus on the judicial side of the atonement, which is more individualistically oriented. However, people who live within a social setting that is shame-based are more oriented toward seeing the entire social group come to Christ together or resist the message together.

In a shame-based culture it is difficult to act in isolation from others, especially those senior to you. The New Testament seems to recognize this reality and, therefore, encourages entire households to come together to minimize the social dislocation and avoid the charge that one person has brought shame on the rest of the family. We should remember that the source of the shame is not so much tied to the propositional content of the Christian message, as it is to the scandalizing notion that someone may be acting independently from the will of the larger group.

In my experience in India over the years, I have seen several remarkable examples of extended families and other larger social groups coming to Christ together. This

61. Even the majority of theological objections are formed by culturally shared agreements as to what they think Christians believe about who Christ is. These views may be strictly adhered

to even after someone becomes intellectually convinced that that belief is not consistent with the actual teachings of the church.

tendency should not be viewed, as it sometimes is by outsiders, as an abandonment of the need for individual faith and repentance. Rather, whenever an extended social network comes to Christ, it should be seen as multicoordinated personal decisions.⁶² This means that multiple numbers of people are deciding to follow Christ in a single movement rather than through dozens of individual decisions isolated from one another.

We now have over a century of sustained missiological research, both exegetical and field work, to support the validity of such group conversions. This research dates back to Gustav Warneck (1834–1910) and continues in major studies published by Waskom Pickett, Donald McGavran, Alan Tippett, Georg Vicedom, and Ralph Winter.⁶³ Orlando Costas, a missiologist from Costa Rica, sums up the research well when he writes,

The concept of multi-individual decisions gives a sociological orientation to the experience of conversion because it affirms that conversion, which depends on a personal act of faith in Christ, can take place in a group setting, where all the members of a given group (family, clan, tribe or mutual interest group) participate in a similar experience with Christ after considering it together and deciding to turn to Christ at the same time.⁶⁴

In short, Christian conversion is always personal, but not necessarily individualistic. The church is not just the sum total of all the individuals who have accepted Christ; the church is the people of God, the bride of Christ, the new humanity. Even in a mass conversion, each person must put his or her faith in Christ, but in a shame-based context their identity is oriented toward the group. Therefore, when they are brought into their new identity in Christ, it emerges as a part of a larger group experience. The meaning of Christ's death and resurrection is received and responded to together.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GUILT AND SHAME IN THE WAY WE IDENTIFY WITH THE ATONEMENT

The final part of this study will briefly reflect on the relationship between guilt and shame. At the beginning of this chapter we noted that anthropologists no longer classify cultures as exclusively guilt-based or shame-based. This is an important insight, because it demonstrates the importance of our developing a deeper understanding of how both guilt and shame function together in the Scriptures and within the context of human cultures. Guilt and shame are distinct, but they are also intricately related to one another. Anthropologists have noted that "guilt is seldom entirely intrinsic," and

62. The phrase is my own, but missiologist Alan Tippett refers to these extended social conversions as "multi-individual decisions" or "multi-personal conversions." See Alan Tippett, *People Movements in Southern Polynesia: A Study in Church Growth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 123–241.

63. See Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre*; Bd. III, 1: *Der Betrieb der Sendung*, 2nd ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1902); Waskom J. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (Lucknow,

India: Lucknow, 1933); Donald A. McGavran, *Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship, 1955); Tippett, *People Movements in Southern Polynesia*; Georg Vicedom, "An Example of Group Conversion," *Practical Anthropology* 9 (1962): 123–28; Ralph Winter, "Quality or Quantity?" in *Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 175–87.

64. Orlando Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1974), 128.

feelings of guilt can be magnified once knowledge of one's actions become public.⁶⁵ So, what is the Christian understanding of the relationship between shame and guilt within the larger context of human identity?

Emil Brunner, in *The Scandal of Christianity*, accepts the distinction noted earlier that all theories of the atonement fall into the two basic categories of objective and subjective theories.⁶⁶ This distinction tends to separate theories of the atonement based on whether they are situated first and foremost in theology or anthropology. The objective theories are "God-centered"; the subjective theories are "man-centered."

Not surprisingly, Brunner chooses Peter Abelard's moral influence theory as the best example of a subjective theory since, according to this view, the cross is "the means by which man understands and believes God's incredible love."⁶⁷ The cross is more of a subjective experience than an objective, judicial transaction. Brunner chooses Anselm's satisfaction theory as the classic example of an objective view of the atonement: "What gives Anselm's thought its superiority is the fact that it starts from the objective fact of guilt. Guilt is a reality, even for God. Man's revolt against God's will is a fact against which God reacts with his wrath."⁶⁸

Brunner is, of course, quite right to point out that Anselm does place great emphasis on objective guilt and the need to satisfy God's wrath, which we deserve. However, Brunner overstates his case when he says that objective guilt is the starting point for Anselm. Actually, in Anselm's famous work *Cur Deus Homo?* in which he establishes his view of the atonement, he begins with the concepts of honor and shame and then proceeds to demonstrate how humanity is objectively guilty before God. When Anselm defines sin, he argues that it is, at root, any act that robs God of his honor. Anselm argues that every rational creature owes God honor and that the only way to honor God is to fully love and obey him in all that we do. Anselm argues that "a person who does not render God this honor due Him, takes from God what is His and dishonors God, and this is to commit sin."⁶⁹

For Anselm, sin is fundamentally a dishonoring or shaming of God because sin robs God of his honor. The specific acts of rebellion against God's will represent the objective fruits of a deeper malady rooted in our unwillingness to honor God. In short, Anselm does rely heavily on the concept of objective, judicial guilt, but roots it in relational, not merely legalistic, soil by demonstrating that objective sinful acts that render us guilty arise first and foremost out of a personal rejection of God whereby we have refused to give him the honor that is due him.⁷⁰

As we come to the end of this study, it is helpful to recognize that Anselm has provided a helpful model that demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between guilt

65. Jakob A. Loewen, "The Social Context of Guilt and Forgiveness," *Practical Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (March–April 1970): 82.

66. Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1951), 86.

67. *Ibid.*, 87.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Anselm, *Why God Became Man and the Virgin Conception*

and *Original Sin by Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Joseph Colleran (Albany, NY: Maji, 1969), 84.

70. Anselm utilizes the language of honor and shame throughout his argument. When Anselm argues for the need for God's justice to be satisfied (1.22), he uses the language of honor and shame. In the course of a relatively short passage Anselm uses "honor" four times, "dishonor" once, and "shame" once. See *ibid.*, 110–11.

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and shame in discussing human alienation. It is true that sin is measured against the objective, revealed will of God. God's justice must be satisfied. It is also true that sin is the fruit of a broken relationship. Sin is both objective and subjective. If we only know about guilt, there is a danger toward legalism and a depersonalization of what it means to be a human in rebellion against God and in discord with our neighbor. If we only know about shame, there is a danger of losing the clear objective basis for God's righteous judgment that transcends the changing vagaries of human culture.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that honor and shame are among the most important values in the ancient Mediterranean world and continue to play a vital role in the formation of human identity in much of North Africa, Middle East, and Asia. A deeper appreciation for how the gospel relates to these values will be increasingly important as the church continues to expand in the context of cultures that are predominantly shame-based. As Christians in the West interact more extensively with our brothers and sisters from the Majority World church, I trust that our appreciation for the place of both guilt and shame in shaping human identity will increase. Jesus bore our guilt and our shame, reversing the curse of the fall for all those who are in Christ. We, who once were identified by guilt and shame, now have a new identity in Christ and have become partakers of his righteousness *and* his honor.

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