

1 PETER 1:22-2:25

1. In 1:24-25, Isa 40:6-8 is quoted. Read Isa 40.
 - a. What parallels do you see between the context of the recipients of Isa 40 and of 1 Peter?
 - b. How would it have encouraged them to be reminded that “all men are like grass”?
 - c. Read 1 Peter 1:22-2:3. How does this quotation fit the flow of Peter’s argument?
 - d. Like the first-century church, the modern church is a *diaspora* (1:1), scattered among the nations, citizens and yet aliens (1:1, 17; 2:11). What of relevance does Isa 40 have to say to the modern church?
2. In 1:22-2:3, Peter turns his attention more fully to the community of believers. What exhortations do you find in this passage? What motivation is given? How do these instructions equip the beleaguered churches of late first-century Asia Minor to face their trials?
3. Regarding salvation and conversion, rank the following from 1 to 5, where 1 and 5 represent:
 - a. 1: salvation/conversion is a process; 5: salvation/conversion is an event
 - b. 1: salvation/conversion is an individual, personal act or experience; 5: salvation/conversion is a social act/experience
 - c. 1: salvation/conversion is about following Jesus ; 5: salvation/conversion is about joining a community
 - d. 1: salvation/conversion is about obedience; 5: salvation/conversion is about belief

Now rank these from the 1-Peter perspective, noting for (a) 1:9, 2:2 and the seed metaphor in 1:23; for (b) 1:22; for (c) 1:1, 2:9-10; for (d) 2:2, 1:21.

4. We saw last week the ways in which 1 Peter casts the largely Gentile church in the role of the new Israel, as in 1:1, where they are the church is dispersion among the nations. In chapter 2 they are now the people of God (1:10), but even “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (2:9). By emphasizing their unity as the people of God, and describing the benefits of this community identity he helps strengthen their cohesion and resolve in the face of their struggles. However, this emphasis is not without its weakness. For instance,

The chief problem is the sense of exclusive eliteness inherent in designating any group as belonging more closely to God. If a consciousness of being the unique people of God has enabled Israel and the Jews to survive over 3000 years of world history, it also explains some of the dislike and hatred directed toward Jews.¹

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, p. 81.

Similarly, Peter emphasizes the holiness of the people of God, which doesn't leave much for those outside the church. "There is no reference to the existence of holiness in outsiders or to reaching out to the non-Christians with any appreciation of the goodness they already have" (RB, 83).

- a. Do you see the pitfall of exclusivity or eliteness at play in the modern church?
 - b. Do we modern Western Christians focus on the holiness of God's elect in a way which leads to looking down on unbelievers?
5. Sociologists have long noted that cultures tend to fall into two categories: those with an emphasis on honor and shame, and those with emphasis on guilt and innocence. In guilt-innocence cultures, conscience plays an important role in determining individual action. In honor-shame cultures a high value is placed on retention of one's good reputation, and that of one's family (city, country, etc.). Guilt tends to be a more internal motivation than shame, and shame more dependent on the actions and attitudes of the group. "Shame cultures" differ from "guilt cultures" in that their members are group-oriented and governed in their attitudes and actions primarily by the opinion and appraisals of significant others.²

If there is a continuum of emphasis between these two extremes, the West lies far in the guilt-innocence direction, while Eastern and near-Eastern cultures generally occupy the shame-honor end of the spectrum. In the first century, both Roman and Jewish cultures placed a very high priority on honor, shame and status.

Rising out of Jewish culture and, for the NT, surrounded by Greco-Roman culture, the Bible also has a central theme of honor and shame. In the OT, in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve feel shame at their disobedience; the Psalmists regularly call on God to shame their enemies (40:14-15; 78:66); God shames pagan deities (e.g. 1 Sam 5:3-4); Zion's future glory is described in the language of honor and shame ("Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame...", Isa 54:5); the shame associated with nakedness (Gen 37:3). In the Gospels, the dishonest manager is too ashamed to beg; Jesus instructs his disciples not to take places of honor lest they be demoted and suffer shame; etc. Both father and younger son suffer shame in the Prodigal Son and yet the father's forgiveness restores the son's honor. In fact, the wording does not indicate the older son is angered by the father's *forgiveness*, but because the younger brother is shown honor despite having brought shame on the family. Another passage in which the honor-shame dynamic is central is Jesus' parable of the two sons asked by their father to work in the vineyard, one of whom refused, but then worked anyway. Westerners tend to overlook the tension added by the refusal, which publicly shames the father. In the culture of Jesus' day, it was better not to shame the father, even at the cost of not doing the work.

Paul's letters also show the importance of honor and shame. In 1 Cor, for instance, Paul describes God's use of the foolish things of this world in order to shame the strong. An awareness of this theme sheds light on Col 2:15, which describes how, "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

² As I hope Andy will elaborate on, honor and shame provide an inherently avoidance-based motivation (avoidance of shame), whereas guilt and innocent are more approach based.

‘a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.’”³ Paul reverses the shame of the cross, both in Jesus’ life and his followers, declaring 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).” The NT demonstrates in various places that the resurrection is not just about guilt and innocence. Jesus “endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). Satan was publicly shamed by Christ when 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” (Tennent, 91). The honor-shame dynamic adds a crucial dimension to Christ’s public, shameful atoning death: Not only does the crucifixion relieve us of *guilt*, it removes our *shame*.

The Christians addressed by 1 Peter have been “slandered as persons supposedly engaged in wrongdoing (2:12; 3:16), insulted (3:9b), disparaged and maligned for dissociating from Gentiles and their dissolute conduct (4:4). It was this ongoing process of abuse that resulted in the undeserved suffering with which this letter is so concerned (1:6; 2:19-20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10)... The nature and weapons of the attack on the Christians is a classic example of public shaming designed to demean and discredit the believers in the court of public opinion with the ultimate aim of forcing their conformity to prevailing norms and values.”⁴

- a. Where, in chapter 1 and 2 do you see evidence that the author is addressing the honor and shame of the recipients?
 - b. “Sociologists who have studied procedures taken across cultures to deal with grievances, conflicts, and disputes have identified seven main options: namely, adjudication, arbitration, mediation, negotiation, coercion, avoidance, and finally what is called ‘lumping it’” (Elliott, 170). What path forward does 1 Peter present?
 - c. What role do honor and shame play in our culture?
 - d. What shame, if any, have you experienced as a Christian? Is Peter solving a problem which doesn’t occur in guilt-shame societies? Or casting in shame-honor terminology a universal problem?
6. Peter refers to “all kinds of trials” (1:6); suffering in general (3:13-17); those who speak against believers (3:16; 4:5). Peter calls their sufferings a “fiery ordeal” (4:13) and says they share in the sufferings of Christ (4:13) because they bear his name (4:14, 16). In 5:9 we read, “...you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”
- Some have taken this 5:9 to mean that this was during a period of empire-wide persecution. The three relevant possibilities for general and official persecution are Nero (64-65), Domitian (90-95) and Trajan (97-117). We have also seen, though, the many ways in which early Christians would have attracted abuse from their fellow Romans. As Raymond Brown points out,

³ Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Zondervan, 2007), p. 88. This discussion question is based on ch. 4 of Tennent.

⁴ John H. Elliott, “Disgraced Yet Graced,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25 (1995), 166-178.

By refusing to engage in the quasi-religious customs surrounding the official Roman governmental structures, by resolutely setting themselves against some of the immoral practices prevalent at the time, and by meeting so often on their own to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Christians were regarded with suspicion and hostility. The readers of 1 Peter were probably being criticized, mocked, discriminated against, and perhaps even brought into court on trumped-up charges. This situation fully explains the references to suffering in 1 Peter—including 5:10, since Christians throughout the empire were indeed suffering this same kind of treatment, and 4:14, 16, since the readers were indeed suffering because they followed Christ and bore his name.⁵

Do you think the persecution described by Peter is official and general or is the sort of local unofficial persecution Brown describes? Or is he referring to the trials of first-century life (illness, poverty, death)? (Or both?)



Fun (psychological) fact: Research has shown that *shame* is at the core of fear of failure, a fear which is certainly found in abundance even in guilt-innocence cultures (see H. A. McGregor and A. J. Elliot, *Personality and Psychology Bulletin*, **31**, 2005, pp. 218-231, or just ask Andy over coffee).

⁵ Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*.