

HOW CHRIST SAVES GOD’S FACE . . . AND OURS: A SOTERIOLOGY OF HONOR AND SHAME

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I. INTRODUCTION

In China, when non-Christians hear a traditional gospel presentation, they frequently have the same reaction: “What does that have to do with me?” (这和我有什么关系?). This should not be surprising. The standard Chinese translation (和合本, CUV) translates “sin” as “crime.” Naturally, Chinese will reply to Christians, “I’m not a criminal. I’ve never stolen anything or murdered a person.”

In many cultures, people do not stress law-imagery as much as Westerners do. When making moral decisions, they do not necessarily appeal to a “universal law” or even to a god who will judge them. To put it another way, I doubt that Chairman Mao (or today, Xi Jin Ping) ever woke up in the morning with Martin Luther’s stricken conscious, crying out, “How will a holy God ever accept me?”

However, whether a person is Chinese, Korean, American, or an ancient Jew, he or she is concerned with issues related to honor and shame. People may not use those exact terms, but they do care about things like their reputation, relationships, and their role in social groups. Honor and shame are *human* dynamics.

Not surprisingly, these twin themes are found throughout the Bible. In fact, today, I will argue that honor and shame are fundamental to the biblical doctrines on sin, atonement, and justification.¹ Theologians routinely overlook these themes, I think, because they misunderstand what is meant by “honor and shame.” Therefore, we should begin by clarifying our terms.

II. WHAT IS “HONOR AND SHAME”?

What do I mean by “honor and shame?” In broad terms, a person’s “honor” refers to his or her perceived public worth within a relational context. In America, millions seek honor by posting updates on social media, like *Facebook*.

On the other hand, “shame” is the ill repute that results when a person has some supposed deficiency or fails to meet the standards prescribed by his or her community. A more colloquial way of talking about honor & shame (in a culture like China for example) is to speak of “giving face” or “losing face.”

¹ This is argued more fully in Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, Calif.: WCIUP, 2013). This paper surveys only a few of the topics addressed there.

Every culture has manifold ways of conveying, assessing, and regulating honor and shame.² There are two ways to get (or lose) honor (or shame). First, it can be *achieved* (based on individual distinctions like getting good grades or winning a sports competition).

Second, it can be *ascribed* (based on one's social position, relationships, titles, etc.).³ For example, if my last name were "Clinton" or "Obama" or "Hilton," I would get a certain respect and attention from people regardless of my individual achievements.

Contrary to common perception, honor and shame have *both* subjective *and* objective dimensions. People are familiar with the subjective side of honor-shame. For example, *psychologically*, a person can feel "ashamed." Or, one can personally feel a sense of honor.

Yet, there is another aspect of honor-shame. Objectively, we—as sinners—dishonor God and "shame" his name before a watching world. Likewise, our peers might (dis)honor us (regardless of our personal feelings). Within our community, we may have an *objective* high status, . . . quite independent of our *subjective*, psychological state.⁴

Generally speaking, an honor-shame worldview has three characteristic features.

First, people are concerned with reputation or "face."

Second, they are more collectivistic than individualistic. In a "collectivistic" context, one's group largely shapes personal identity. In addition, the community's needs are generally prioritized over an individual's concerns. In sports subculture, we see this dynamic when people celebrate a victory by yelling, "We won the championship!!" We might say, "Excuse me, you said 'we'? You were not on the field."

Third, vertical, hierarchic relationships are often more influential than horizontal (i.e. peer) relationships. As a result, those in so-called "honor-shame" cultures have a great respect for authority. We can remember these three features using alliteration: reputation, relationships, role (which entails responsibility and rank).

I've heard people suggest that an honor-shame perspective leads to relativism. Actually, from a biblical perspective, *God is the ultimate measure for defining honor or glory*. In relationship to God, human sin is exposed as shame.

² Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 6.

³ For elaboration, see deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 23–42. A brief introduction to honor shame within a biblical context is Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," *BTB* 23, no. 4 (1993): 167–76. In Chinese culture, see David Yau-fai Ho, "On the Concept of Face," *AJS* 81, no. 4 (1976): 870. One of the most famous anthropological treatments is J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴ As an aside, "guilt" also has two aspects—subjective and objective. On the one hand, we can *feel* guilty. On the other hand, we can *be* guilty in fact or in status (as when a criminal is convicted).

Theologically, we should not dichotomize law and honor-shame. After all, the Mosaic Law was a covenant that reveals God’s glory and established a relationship with Israel through which God shares his honor with his people.

III. WE ARE GUILTY OF SHAME (SIN)

Next, we need to discuss “sin” so that we can better understand salvation. Biblical writers frequently use honor-shame language to describe “sin”. In Romans 1:18–31, Paul gives an extended description of unrighteousness; yet, he never once mentions “law”; rather, he speaks of dishonor and shame. Verses 21–23 summarize the point:

[21] For although they knew God, *they did not honor him as God* or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and *exchanged the glory of the immortal God* for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

In essence, sin treats God as though He were not infinitely valuable. In China, I compare “sin” to publically spitting in your father’s face. Then, in vv. 24–31, we see the consequence. Because people do not acknowledge God, they themselves become shameful.⁵

Paul introduces the Mosaic Law in chapter 2; yet, he still uses honor-shame language to describe sin. In Rom 2:23–24, he says, “You who boast in the law *dishonor* God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Even at a grammatical level, observe that breaking the Law is one *means* to (dis)honoring God. That is, the core problem is indicated by the main verb “dishonor” (ἀτιμάζεις). “Breaking the law” (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου) is a prepositional phrase, which shows one particular way or circumstance that God is dishonored. Verse 24 gives the a ground clause (γὰρ . . .) for v. 23 and confirms that honor-shame is the central issue (not law).⁶

Finally, we recall Rom 3:23, which is perhaps the Bible’s most famous verse on sin: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” There is an easy way to remember these verses (which describe “sin” using honor-shame): they are Rom 1:23, 2:23, and 3:23.

Unfortunately, some people get the order backwards. In *The Cross and Salvation*, Bruce Demarest summarizes a common idea about sin when a section where he discusses *penal substitution*. He says that sin “. . . is primarily a violation of God’s law, *not his honor*”⁷ My interpretation suggests the exact opposite and the dichotomy between God’s law and His honor. I

⁵ Cf. John 7:18, where Jesus clearly defines (un)righteousness in terms of glory: “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory [δόξαν]; but the one who seeks the glory [δόξαν] of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no unrighteousness [ἀδικία].” For some unknown reason, the ESV says “falsehood” instead of “unrighteousness.”

⁶ Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 240.

⁷ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), 158. Emphasis mine. This paragraph summarizes my fuller comments in Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 207.

affirm that sin *is most basically a violation against God's honor*. Law points to merely one social sphere within an honor-shame world.

One of the ways I like to summarize all this is by saying that sin is making God “lose face.” When we sin, we do not glorify God because we essentially say that God is not faithful or worthy of praise (cf. Rom 4:20; 14:23). Sin is far more than “law” breaking. Genuine obedience seeks to *honor* God. This is more than conforming to a rule.⁸

Shame is both the *fruit* and the *root* of sin. It is important to grasp the essence of sin. How we define a problem will largely shape the way we understand the solution.⁹

IV. CHRIST SAVES GOD'S FACE (ATONEMENT)

What is salvation from the perspective of honor and shame? People often ask what Christ's death accomplishes for us. I suggest we begin with another question: what does Christ's atonement do *for God*?

Let us begin at a big-picture level.¹⁰ The atonement is possible because of what Jesus does for God. In God's covenant with Abraham, God identifies with humanity, casting his lot with “all nations.” The cross saves God's “face” from the shame of His people. Were he to reject the people whom he promised to save, God would deny himself, shamed for all eternity. He ceases to be God

In Rom 15:8–9, Paul says that Christ shows “God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” Jesus saves God's “face.” God's own honor is bound up in the cross. The cross is the way that God keeps his promises, which He guaranteed by oath, showing “the unchangeable character of his purpose” (Heb 6:17–18).¹¹

Sin raises the need for God's own vindication. This requires that He manifest his supreme worth in all the earth. God's character is far more than a foil that exposes our sin. God's honor is an end in itself.

These observations lead to a surprising and disturbing conclusion: *Jesus died for God*. The atonement is *necessary* but not merely for the sake of human salvation. I am claiming *more* than simply “God wants to glorify himself.” Rather, if Christ did not die, God would not be righteous. In that case, God lacks honor. God is shameful. The atonement is a *God-centered* act.

⁸ Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 240.

⁹ Gary Anderson rightly says, “How we talk about sin . . . influences what we will do about it.” See his book *Sin: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 2009), 13.

¹⁰ Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 197–98.

¹¹ To be sure, His own covenantal obligations are not externally “binding” to God since he by grace first committed himself to mankind. He freely initiates his covenant. The only thing that “limits” God is His own gracious freedom.

Christ's death vindicates God's righteousness whereby he is able to save his people. God's glory is not an obstacle to his main goal, i.e. saving sinners. Saving sinners is a *means* to his main goal. God seeks face; therefore, he seeks sinners.

With respect to people, how does salvation work?

From birth, humans have a debt to our God the Creator.¹² A “debt” or obligation is not necessarily something negative. As sons and daughters, made in the image of God, we are called to glorify God our Father and King.¹³ In Romans 13, Paul says we should “pay . . . honor to whom honor is owed” and to “owe [ὀφείλετε] no one anything, except to love each other.” I call this an “honor debt.” We must give God “face.” Honoring God as Father and King entails our obedience.

Because we fall short of God's glory, we also have a “sin debt.” The Bible characterizes sin as a debt that needs to be forgiven (Matt 6:12; 18:27–34; Luke 7:41–43; 16:5; Col 2:14). If one does not pay this debt, the offender suffers the shame of slavery, exile, and even death.¹⁴

As a consequence, God in the Mosaic Law commands a “sin-offering” (תַּאֲטִיף, ḥattā' t), which acts as a restitution payment and satisfies our debt-obligation due to sin.¹⁵ Ultimately, Hebrews 10:34 tells us, the blood of animals cannot cleanse our impurity, which defames God's honor.¹⁶

Therefore, Christ pays both our “honor debt” and our “sin debt.” This can be called “honor substitution.” As the second Adam, the perfect “image of God,” Christ's obedience perfectly glorifies God.¹⁷ Therefore, he pays the debt the human family owes God (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5).¹⁸

¹² Much of this paragraph draws from Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 182–83.

¹³ Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park, Kans.: Two Age Press, 2000), 44–66. In addition, Richard Gaffin points out that Paul explicitly says that man “is the image and glory of God.” See Richard B. Gaffin, “The Glory of God in Paul's Epistles,” in *The Glory of God* (ed. Christopher Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 133–34.

¹⁴ Anderson, Gary A. *Sin: A History*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), Kindle Location 259–285. Isa 50:1 is one example that illustrates the point.

¹⁵ The language of “sin offering” (תַּאֲטִיף) carries definitive economic overtones. Cf. Jenni Ernst and Claus Westermann, “עֲוֹן,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997); Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsh, “Leviticus 4–5,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996).

¹⁶ In the words of Mal 1:7, our sins “pollutes” (נִלְאָה) God. To offend an infinitely glorious God deserves the ultimate retribution. This argument is seen in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourse, 1734–1738* (vol. 19 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*; ed. M. X. Lesser; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 342. n.p. [cited 19 July 2012]. Online: <http://edwards.yale.edu/>. God vindicates the worth of his honor via retribution. This is deSilva's point regarding Heb 10:26–31. See his work, “Despising Shame: A Cultural-Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *JBL* 113 (1994): 454–55. Also, see deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 161, note 60. Also, see Deut 32:35–36; Job 40:10–11; Ps 149:5–19; Isa 59:9–19 (esp. vv. 18–19); 66:5–6; Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9; Ezek 38:16–18; Rom 9:22–23; Rev 15:1–8, 19:1–2. Also, compare Rom 12:19, 1 Thess 4:6. In Ex 34:5–7, God's glory and name is found in his punishing iniquity (v. 7b).

¹⁷ Wright makes a similar point in discussing Jesus as the last Adam, “[Jesus'] role was that of obedience, not merely *in place of* disobedience but in order to *undo* that disobedience.” Jesus' “obedience unto death [is] the task by which the old Adamic humanity is redeemed” in N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 38. Jesus' sinless life not only gives significance to his death; his death also gives his life its

Accordingly, Christ is able to pay our “sin debt” on the cross, when becomes a sin offering (Rom 8:3; cf. 2 Cor 5:21). As a “compensatory payment,” Christ takes away the human shame we call “sin.”¹⁹ His shameful death restores *God’s honor*. In this way, He averts God’s wrath, therefore making reconciliation [and justification] possible.²⁰

V. VINDICATING HONOR (JUSTIFICATION)

How do we describe “justification” from an honor-shame perspective?

When God justifies us in Christ, *he declares us to be one of his people*. We belong to his kingdom-family. This new identity restores honor and removes shame. Those who are “in Christ” by faith receive the Spirit, who enables them to glorify God the Father with their life.

Objectively, justification is possible because of “honor substitution” (discussed above). Christ gives his honor to his people. One might say his honor is reckoned or imputed to us. In John 17:22, Jesus intercedes for his followers, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.”²¹

full value. His death completes the life that manifests God’s name by doing the work given to him (cf. John 17:4, 6) Accordingly, Paul also highlights Jesus’ “obedience unto death” so that “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9–11; cf. Rom 5:12–21). See Wright, *Climax*, 38–40, 91–92.

¹⁸ Contrary to some people’s concerns, Emile Nicole’s conclusion is undeniable when he says that several occurrences of כִּפָּר—group “indisputably link it to the notion of compensation.” See his argument at Emile Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004), 47. In addition, it is entirely appropriate to appeal to Christ’s life when speaking of his death and the cross. First of all, Christ’s perfect obedience includes his submitting to the cross. Second, his life is what qualified him to be a substitute such that his death has any value. Cf. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*.

¹⁹ This sort of atonement was foretold by the prophet Ezekiel 16:62–63, God says, “I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.” “Shame” translates ἀτιμίας (LXX)/ כְּלִמָּה (MT). “Atone” renders ἐξιλάσασθαι (LXX)/ כִּפָּר.

²⁰ God’s wrath and atonement are clearly linked in Num 16:46–47; Ps 78:38. Cf. Prov 16:14. Consider how a compensatory payment brings about atonement and appeases wrath in Exod 21:29–30; 30:11–16; Lev 5:6, 11–13, 16–17; Num 5:7–8; 16:44–50 (cf. Num 31:48–51). Conceptually, the connection is found in wisdom passages (Prov 6:34–35; 13:8; 21:14). Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (3d. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 144–213. Although Morris emphasizes “propitiation” and atonement as the “the removal of wrath,” this misses *how* this is accomplished, that is, the sacrifice satisfies God’s demand for honor. According to Ezekiel, God’s wrath is poured out in order to vindicate God’s honor (Ezek 6:3–14; 30:17–26; 38:17, 23; 39:7, 13, 21).

²¹ Interesting, even D. A. Carson admits, “no text explicitly says” that “Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us.” Even though John 17:22 is a rather direct explication of “glory-imputation,” few have paid the idea much attention. D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2004), 78. Also see Rom 8:30, “those whom he justified he also glorified.” According to Hebrews, Jesus is worthy of “glory and honor,” being without the shame of sin; therefore, he brings “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:9–10; cf. 4:15).

In Romans, Paul uses honor-shame language to explain justification. In Rom 10:10–11, Paul writes, “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’” (cf. 9:33). In Rom 5:2, 5 those who are justified can rejoice in “hope in the glory of God” and that “hope does not put us to shame” (Rom 5:2, 5). In Rom 3:24–26, justification solves the glory problem of 3:23.

What is the nature of justifying faith? *The faith that justifies is the faith that glorifies.*²² Abraham typifies justifying faith: “No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (Rom 4:20–21). No wonder Rom 14:23 says that whatever does not come from faith is reckoned as “sin.”

Compare how Jesus talked about faith and righteousness. Observe in John 5:44 how Jesus defines “faith” in terms of glory-seeking: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

In John 7:18, Jesus similarly describes a righteous person: “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no *unrighteousness* [ἀδικία; ESV has *falsehood*].”

Paul’s Jewish opponents misunderstood the nature of true glory and thus “works of the Law.” They “relied on” and “boast in” the Law (Rom 2:17, 23). Boasting expresses one’s honor-shame perspective and thus sense of identity. In the eyes of many ancient Jews, the “Law” was a way of getting *ascribed honor*.

How? They *thought* God reserved the greatest honor for those who belonged to Israel.²³ However, according to Romans 3:27–30, Christ excludes ethnocentric boasting since God is one (Rom 3:27–30; cf. 10:12; Gal 3:20; 1 Tim 2:5).²⁴ When ancient Jews denied justification by faith, they ironically were attempting to diminish God’s glory by reducing him to a tribal deity.

²² Justifying faith is essentially a boasting in Christ. Piper observes in 2 Cor 1:24 and Phil 1:25, “joy and faith are almost interchangeable.” See John Piper, “Savoring, Instilling, and Spreading the Vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church,” *Desiring God*, 20 Sept 1987, n.p. [cited 9 Jun 2012]. Online: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/savoring-instilling-and-spreading-the-vision-at-bethlehem-baptist-church>. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia* (ed. Hilton C. Oswald; trans. Walter G. Tillmans and Jacob Preus; St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1972), 248. With respect to Paul, his righteousness stems from his being among those who “glory [καυχώμενοι] in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3; cf. Gal 6:12–14). One reason boasting is so important is because the Father honors those who honor the Son (John 5:22–24; 12:23–28). In fact, God’s whole scheme of salvation is “so that no one may boast,” in other things like wisdom, ethnicity, etc. (Eph 2:9; cf. 1 Cor 1:26–31).

²³ Accordingly, Paul describes them as those who “rely on” and “boast in” the law (Rom 2:17, 23). Boasting expresses one’s honor-shame perspective and thus sense of identity. Though I have serious concerns about Yeo’s overall view of justification, he correctly points out that the Christian has “been set right by God from shame and curse so that now propriety, honor, and freedom characterizes the new and rightful relationship one has with God.” See his work, *Musing*, 207. In almost identical terms, cf. Yeo, “Introduction: Navigating Romans,” 14. However, here he says the δικαι- root emphasizes God’s acting for a “group of people.”

²⁴ Jayson Georges then posits, “[S]alvation in Romans is consistently presented as inclusion into the group of God’s honored people.” One glorifies God by boasting in the one true God, not social distinctives, by “no longer

In Rom 2, we see another side of works. Paul describes works as a means of getting *achieved honor and glory*. In Rom 2:5–7, “God’s righteous judgment” depends on whether people “in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality.” Otherwise, v. 8 says they do “unrighteous.” Romans 2:9–10 lists two possible results of one’s works: *either* “tribulation and distress” *or* “glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.”

If you look closely, you will observe that the person in v. 10 (who gains glory, honor and peace) is equivalent to the justified person in v. 13. This connection becomes significant when we then recall verses 6–7. According to vv. 6–7, one is justified by seeking after glory and honor.²⁵ The lone Greek verb in v. 7 is “seek” [ζητοῦσιν], not “well-doing” [ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ, or “good works”].

Doing “works” is a type of glory seeking. In other words, our works reveal the type of glory we seek. Every one seeks to “get face” and not “lose face.” Our actions are ways that we attempt to gain both *ascribed* and *achieved honor*.

One seeks honor and glory *through* works. The key question is this: *from whom do we want “face,” honor, praise, and glory?* Paul speaks to this directly in Rom 2:29, “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise [ἔπαινος] is not from man but from God.”

Readers are supposed to ask, “Whose ‘face’ do we seek?” The answer to that question determines our identity. Justified people pursue glory . . . yet it is not the kind that people typically desire.

Today, I don’t have time to elaborate on a number of other related themes. However, in my book *Saving God’s Face*, I show the how ascribed honor and achieved honor function within Philippians 3. In addition, I explain the relationship between faith and boasting. In short, we will praise or celebrate that which we give our allegiance to.

Let me offer a few summary remarks about justification. When Paul speaks of justification, Paul’s argument foremost concerns identity. He explains *who he is* and hence how that is reflected.²⁶ As a corollary, we can infer *how* people are justified. Traditional views of justification mistake the order. The “who” question leads to the “how” question.

By analogy, imagine a man says, “I can give birth to a baby.” We would correct his understanding about *who* can have a baby by explaining *how* a person becomes pregnant.

depend[ing] on culture for honor,” but instead gaining “a new honor code for the Christian community.” See Jayson Georges, “From Shame to Honor: A Theological Reading of Romans for Honor-Shame Contexts,” *Missiology* 38, no. 3 (2010): 302. Philip Esler explicitly calls righteousness an “ascribed honor” that affects one’s group identity in his *Conflict and Identity in Romans* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 167, 186–88.

²⁵ The Greek for Rom 2:7: “τοῖς μὲν καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν ζωὴν αἰώνιον.”

²⁶ Bird echoes Seifrid saying, “[T]he status of the individual before God and the status of individuals within a group are not mutually exclusive categories.” He notes Mark Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 63.

When God justifies us by faith and not by the Jewish Law, he usurps the honor-shame standards of the world and thus redefines “insiders” and “outsiders.”

God justifies those who people who seek God’s “face,” who glorify Him above all. Because of their allegiance to Christ, they share in Christ’s honor as well as his shame (i.e. suffering, rejection, etc.). Justification inherently concerns our collective identity. It is less about “me” and “God” and more about “us” and “God.” However, the “us” is redefined in relationship to Christ.²⁷

VI. TRANSFORMATION (A PRACTICAL VIEW OF SALVATION)

Salvation is work of transformation unto final glorification. God in Christ transforms our *identity* and our *practice*. With respect to identity, God’s adopts his people as children (Rom 8:14–19). Conversion is collective —our basic group identity is radically changed.

Whoever is willing to forsake natural “brothers or sisters or mother or father or children” (Mark 10:29; cf. Matt 25:40) is enabled to join Abraham’s family of faith (cf. John 8:31–58; Gal 4:22–31). When we exchange relational loyalties, Jesus “is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11). Those who belong to Christ’s family are honored.²⁸ As Jesus says in John 12:26, “If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

In addition, God’s Spirit transforms the Christian in *practice*. The Father gives the Holy Spirit his children. The Spirit changes our hearts such that we seek God’s “face” above all others (Rom 2:28–29; cf. John 12:26; Phil 3:3).

Previously, we suffered as slaves under sin’s imperialistic rule. Yet, according to Rom 6, we are freed so that we “have become obedient from the heart” (Rom 6:17). As slaves to God, our lives are not marked by shameful patterns of living that ultimately lead to death (Rom 6:21–23).²⁹

²⁷ The gospel reveals God’s righteousness by challenging and transforming social groupings and identity. Robert Jewett, “Honor and Shame in the Argument of Romans,” in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs* (ed. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra R. Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press, 1997), 262.

²⁸ Trevor Burke argues that adoption historically would have been seen as bestowing extraordinary honor upon the believer. Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 152–76. Packer calls adoption “the *primary and fundamental* blessing of the gospel.” See Packer, *Knowing God*, 206.

²⁹ Hafemann rightly argues that the Spirit’s power is decisive in salvation history. Previously, God’s people “transgressed the law because it lacked the power of the Spirit to put it into practice. . . . The problem was that the law was given apart from the transforming work of the Spirit to a hardened and resistant people.” See Tom Schreiner, “Review of Scott Hafemann, ‘Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3,’” n.d., n.p. [cited 19 Nov 2010]. Online: http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/review_Hafemann2Cor3.pdf.htm; Prior to Jesus’ ascension, the Spirit was still needed for regeneration (cf. Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3). Otherwise, I label “Christian” the salvation that follows Jesus’ departure. Kevin Vanhoozer’s thesis is succinct: “[T]he saving significance of Christ’s death consists in making possible God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.” See Vanhoozer, “The Atonement,” 398–99. He adds, “Jesus’ death saves because it enables a new *objective* situation, namely, the end of exile and the construction of a new kind of temple, indwelt by God’s Spirit. The cross saves, not by bequeathing an example, but

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus (John 16:14). He does this in part by sanctifying a community of nations, i.e. the Church. We form a temple wherein God's Spirit dwells without regard for ethnicity.

Some evangelicals get nervous in talking about this practical dimension of salvation. However, when we do this, we obscure the glory of God revealed in salvation. In addition, we perpetuate the impression that Christian salvation is other-worldly or merely about the afterlife. Of course, life after death is important.

Knowing that God will make a new heaven and new earth should remind us that Christian soteriology emphatically concerns the concrete world and our manner of life here and now. In so doing, our lives will foretell the day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

Christians are people who *seek glory through shame*.³⁰ After all, Hebrews 2:9 say that Jesus himself was "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). A soteriology of honor and shame does not merely affect our perspective about death; it changes one's practice in life. In the words of Rom 8:17, we will be willing to "... suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

VII. CONCLUSION: A CONTEXTUALIZED MESSAGE FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God . . ." but do we? In 1 Tim 1:17, Paul proclaims, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever." *Does our theological language sufficiently reflect this prayer?*

I suggest Christians are *not justified when they marginalize honor and shame in relationship to salvation*. We need to broaden our perspective to see these two pervasive and powerful motifs in Scripture.

The gospel proclaims a radically new worldview and necessarily challenges common notions of worth, identity, and thus our loyalties. When a person gives allegiance to Christ, one loses "face" in the eyes of the world and even becomes an "outsider" in his or her own family.

Honor and shame are also very significant to church's global mission. When Christians lay an unbalanced stress on "law" and the "individual," it becomes very easy for non-Westerners to get the impression that the Bible is a Western book. If we are not careful, we run the risk of

by bequeathing to the church the same power that enabled Jesus to lay down his life for others: the Spirit of self-giving love" (pp. 400–401).

³⁰ In Chinese I make the point via the phrase "以辱为荣," which I have explained further in Jackson Wu, "Biblical Theology from a Chinese Perspective" in *Global Missiology* (July 2013). Online: www.globalmissiology.org.

“judaizing” the non-Western world (so to speak). That is, we may inadvertently make people first think like Westerners before they have the ability to become Christians.

I do not at all deny the importance of “law” as a Scriptural metaphor; yet, we do not want to settle for what is merely true (i.e. the law) at the expense of a more robust view of salvation.

Let us not settle for innocence when Christ offers us glory.