

SIN AND SALVATION IN A SHAME / HONOR CULTURE

Introduction – In North America and Europe the dominant culture has been a law-based guilt / innocence one. Most of the rest of the world is characterized by a shame / honor culture. All three basic cultural principles, including fear / power, are present in every society even if they are not the dominant one.

A. The Nature of a Shame / Honor Culture

1. Guilt is the result of an individual act or omission of the sort that calls for punishment or acceptance of responsibility for it. On the other hand, shame is a violation of community expectations that illicit contempt, derision, or avoidance by that identity group. It must be hidden, avenged, or overcome.
2. Honor comes from the family, tribe, or group to which you belong. You bring either shame or honor on your group by your behavior and speech.
3. Honor in the first century Greco-Roman culture had to do with one's identity group, rhetoric ability, courageous accomplishments, avoidance of shame, financial success, and virtuous behaviors.
4. The details of what is shameful or honorable differ from one society to another.

B. The New Testament in a Shame / Honor Culture

1. Jesus shamed the religious leaders by his behavior and verbal altercations. They humiliated him by public crucifixion.
2. The message of a King who came from a humble background to be shamed on a cross and resurrected not to avenge his honor but to ascend to rule an invisible kingdom contradicted popular expectations.
3. Christianity created a counterculture where what was honorable is following the self-sacrificial example of Jesus. Our honor is a gift of the Creator God who adopts us into his family and makes us heirs of the promised world to come.

C. Shame and Honor in the Book of Hebrews

1. The book is addressed to Messianic Jews who were faltering in their commitment to Christ and contemplating a return to traditional Judaism.
2. Despising the shame – Hebrews 12:2-4
3. Their shameful past suffering – Hebrews 10:32-36
4. The superiority of Christ

Hebrews 1:1-4

Hebrews 3:1-3

Hebrews 7:20-22

5. The example of past godly people of faith who were despised by their culture is the focus of chapter 11 – Hebrews 11:35-39
6. Shaming those who have had sufficient time to grow up spiritually, but have not – Hebrews 5:12-14

D. America and the Influence of Shame / Honor

1. American citizens' mobility has tended to undermine the establishment of community expectations. Emphasis on the individual also contributed to a weakening of shame/ honor. The growing presence of media is allowing the resurgence of shame / honor in niche groups.
2. We see remnants of shame / honor codes in organized athletics and the military.
3. Instead of shame and honor terminology, we hear "cool" and "uncool," which is attempting to establish community expectations.
4. There is an attempt to eliminate guilt over traditional Christian morality and to shame people of faith in the public square. This campaign highlights religious people's hypocrisies, scientific simplicity, and salvation exclusivity.
5. Psychology has concentrated on eliminating all guilt by a you're OK / I'm OK perspective. Shame is treated as an individual developmental issue.

Conclusion – In resisting social pressures to conform to societal ideas of shame and honor, we must create a strong Christian community. We cannot let our society shame us into silence about our faith.

Hebrews 3:12-14

(There will be no discussion groups today, but a brief opportunity to ask questions or make comments after the closing prayer.)