

SIN AND SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT'S SHAME / HONOR CULTURE

Introduction – The basis for ancient and modern societies are three perspectives. There are guilt / innocence, shame / honor, and fear / power cultures. Europe and North America are predominantly a guilt / innocence culture while most of the rest of the world are shame / honor societies.

A. Shame and Honor in the World of the Old Testament

1. Everyone got their identity from the extended family, tribe, city, or country. These groups enforced the groups' expectations for external behavior and communication. Slaves were the least honorable while kings were considered the most honorable.
2. Hospitality was a universal virtue of the Middle East. You were expected to respect, feed, shelter and protect unexpected strangers. To not do so brought terrible shame on you and your whole identity group. The contrast between Abraham and Lot's hospitality compared to Sodom and Gomorrah is a clear example (Genesis 18-19).
3. The message of the Old Testament is how the Creator gave honor to a wandering herdsmen, like Abraham, and judged the proud and powerful cultures around him. God rescued the people of Israel from abject slavery, shaming Egypt, and gave his people a Law, a land, and an honorable reputation.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

B. Examples of Shame / Honor

1. Giving God honor rather than yourself was essential to avoid shameful consequences.

Numbers 20:2-12

2. Faith and hope in God prevented the group from being shamed.

Psalms 25:1-3

3. The resurrection of all people will bring either shame or honor.

Daniel 12:1-3

4. Proverbs assumes a shame / honor culture.

Proverbs 3:33-35

Proverbs 11:16

Proverbs 13:18

Proverbs 14:31

Proverbs 18:3

Proverbs 20:3

Proverbs 25:6-10

C. Shame and Honor in Modern America

1. It is not the dominant influence but has always been present in different ways. My parents were always concerned with their reputation in our town.
2. The male culture, in contrast to the female one, puts a premium on respect. Disrespect can result in anger, fighting, and even killing. This is seen in male athletics and the military culture.
3. Advertising uses feelings of shame to motivate us to buy certain products so we will be considered cool or respected by others.
4. When it comes to our sexuality there is pressure to overcome our natural shame at nudity and public exposure. This is being replaced with a glorification of it in pornography.
5. The right of religious freedom has been replaced with freedom from religion in the public square (guilt / innocence). Religion and religious beliefs are ridiculed and treated contemptuously in the public square in order to shame us into silence (shame / honor).

Conclusion – We are rescued from our position of shame before God. Through Christ he is giving us a place of honor.

Romans 2:6-10

Romans 10:10-11