

DOES THE “PLAN OF SALVATION” MAKE DISCIPLES? WHY HONOR AND SHAME ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY¹

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Discipleship is fundamental to developing Christian leaders. A discussion on Christian leadership requires we consider the importance of the church and personal character. Some people might not realize that these two topics correspond with prominent themes in honor-shame cultures; namely, collective identity and a practical approach to ethics. Many Asian religions and philosophies tend to emphasize the importance of community yet veer away from abstract doctrines that do not affect one’s daily life. Therefore, this paper considers how honor and shame can and should influence our approach to discipleship and thus Christian leadership in general.

How might honor and shame reshape our view of Christian discipleship and evangelism? I refer both to one’s being a disciple of Christ and to making disciples. This is a big question that raises many other questions. For instance, “What are honor and shame?” and “What is the gospel?”² More difficult is this: How does one actually demonstrate that honor and shame are critical for discipleship? After all, “discipleship” is a rather broad term.

These questions require me to be clear about my methodology. Honor and shame are comprehensive and complex concepts, which affect every meaningful area of one’s life. Therefore, we need an integrated approach in order to perceive the significance of honor and shame for the church’s ministry.

There is an inherent connection between the gospel and discipleship.³ Believing the gospel is a mark of Christ’s disciples. We will use an honor-shame perspective to see whether “the plan of salvation” naturally leads disciples to live “in a manner worthy of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). Since this is a rather nebulous standard, I will focus more specifically on Christian morality and ethics. Broadly, “Christian morality” refers to right Christian behavior, speech, and motives. Certainly, Christian discipleship is more than living a moral or ethical life; however, it is not less than this.

In what follows, I will use an honor-shame “lens” to examine common gospel presentations (which I will generically call “the plan of salvation”). From the standpoint of honor and shame, I argue that certain gospel presentations do not adequately foster the sort of moral

¹ This article was originally presented at the Asian Society of Missiology conference in Bangkok, Thailand (Jan 2015).

² After all, a number of books debate what exactly constitutes the gospel. For example, see Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011); N. T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015); for a conventional evangelical view, see Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).

³ For example, Paul urges the disciples in Philippi, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). Similarly, Paul in 1 Tim 1:8–11 lists a range of behaviors that are “contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.” Of course, we could speak more broadly about how the promised blessing of the gospel is the Holy Spirit, who causes disciples to bear the Spirit of the fruit (cf. Gal 3–5).

life fitting for a Christian disciple (from a biblically normative perspective). Because “the plan of salvation” does not account for honor-shame dynamics, it might in fact nurture a moral perspective that is contrary to both various cultures and even the Bible itself. Accordingly, this paper seeks to *demonstrate* the importance of honor and shame in shaping the life and ministry of a disciple.

The aim of this essay is constructive. Because it challenges conventional views about the gospel and discipleship, some readers could misinterpret my intent. The foundation of Christian discipleship is the gospel. What if our understanding of the gospel does not in fact facilitate disciple making? Therefore, it is imperative that one reexamines the foundation being laid for making disciples and training leaders within the church.

This study offers at least three major benefits to readers. It shows the value of using an honor-shame perspective when reading Scripture. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates the systemic importance of honor and shame for living as Christian disciples. For some people, the essay will also expose a blind spot concerning honor and shame. Finally, the concluding section highlights a number of implications for the church’s ministry.

Why Do We Use Honor and Shame?

We begin with a question, “Why use honor and shame to assess evangelical gospel presentations?” The plan of salvation largely presumes a “Western” perspective. That is, in addition to being individualistic and propositional, conventional Western methods of evangelism rely heavily on law language. Legal metaphors are overemphasized such that sin is primarily described as a “crime” and God as a “judge.”⁴ It is difficult to assess Western presentations while using an essentially Western worldview lens. In so doing, one might never question the validity of certain metaphors or particular emphases that reflect cultural or denominational bias (not necessarily that of the biblical writers).

Therefore, it can be helpful to use a different cultural perspective to critique these presentations, which I have called “the plan of salvation.” (Again, “the plan of salvation” is a generic term often used to describe traditional evangelical gospel presentations.) I want readers momentarily to assume a perspective more characteristic of honor-shame cultures. We will use this cultural lens to analyze the meaning and relevance of the plan of salvation within an honor-shame oriented context. In this way, we will be able to identify blind spots within the plan of salvation. In particular, we will find various ways in which some gospel presentations could be regarded as irrelevant and perhaps even shameful.

I should make a few qualifying remarks. First, I affirm that authority of the Bible in determining whether a gospel presentation conveys truth. Since biblical writers often use honor and shame to convey their message, there need not be a tension between the Bible and an

⁴ Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, Calif.: WCIUP, 2013), 10–31.

honor-shame perspective.⁵ Second, even if every statement in the plan of salvation is true, biblically speaking, those truths may not reflect the authors' primary emphases and meaning with respect to a given concept or context.⁶ For instance, it is true that I married my wife because she is a woman; yet, that statement does not at all reflect my central reasons for marrying her. Thus, one might preach true doctrines but not faithfully convey the biblical view of the gospel.

What are Honor-Shame Cultures?

Honor-shame cultures are not monolithic. The specific rules and practices vary greatly from one setting to another. However, at least three interconnected themes regularly mark an honor-shame context. They include reputation, relationship, and rank.

People in many Asian cultures are greatly concerned with their reputation of “face.” From a standard Chinese perspective, people should have a sense of shame. If someone asks, “Do you want face [*lian*]?” it is expected you will say “yes.” If a person does not care about face, he or she is considered dangerous, at least to some degree. The individual is undependable or untrustworthy. A moral person is concerned with others' opinions. If we are indifferent to the opinions of our group (whether family, friend network, village, etc.), they will look down upon us. Laws and rules are insufficient for regulating moral behavior. Perhaps, rules will inspire fear; but they do not bring about lasting change. To use more familiar Christian language, laws do not inspire right behavior; rather it is love—having a concern for others—that makes an action truly virtuous.

There are at least two reasons it is important both to show honor to others and for people to have “face” themselves. First, it shows love to give people “face” (i.e. honor). Honoring others shows that we value and respect them. Second, by having “face”, people secure a sense of safety. When they have no face, people feel threatened (cf. Gen 11:4). These are important aspects to being healthy disciples.

Furthermore, people in honor-shame cultures tend to see their identity in terms of their relationships. They emphasize “collective identity” more than individual distinctions. For individuals, living in a collectivistic society entails certain responsibilities and duties. Family relationships are prioritized. Naturally, it is important to discern who are insiders and outsiders. A person's primary responsibility is to insiders.⁷

In a group-oriented environment, it is not surprising that people are sensitive to rank or hierarchy. Collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize the importance of authority figures, such as a father, king, and community elders. This might be expressed in people venerating or showing

⁵ The literature in support of this is vast. Examples include David A. deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁶ See Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2015), 17–26.

⁷ Some Western missiologists have begun to see the importance of collective identity, including David Watson and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 105–7.

respect to ancestors. In this context, a truly moral person is willing to obey authority and conform to the group's standards. One is expected to play his or her role within their group. Loyalty and respect are critical values. Stories, symbols, and tradition carry authority within a group. From a collectivistic perspective, individuality does not tend to foster ethical behavior.

Readers should consider for a moment the implications of a worldview like the one described above. There is nothing inherently unbiblical or sinful about people being sensitive to things like respect, collective identity, and authority. In fact, there is virtue in them. Yet, we should ask this question: How might the plan of salvation stand in tension with these cultural concerns and values?

What is the “Plan of Salvation”?

To begin, we should clarify what is meant by “the plan of salvation.” This terminology is very common. It summarizes how evangelicals generally share the gospel. When it comes to precise details, there are of course variations in how different individuals explain “the plan of salvation.” However, I suggest the following five points generally represent the most common emphases found within the “plan of salvation.”

1. We must confess we are sinners.
2. We all deserve to receive judgment.
3. God loves us and sends Jesus to save us.
4. Jesus died on the cross in our place.
5. If we believe in Christ, repenting of sin, God will forgive our sin and we will have eternal life.

Although particular churches and ministries might add other elements, the above five points by and large constitute core components of any evangelical “plan of salvation.” I don't object to these statements as theological points; rather, the problem lies in how these points collectively frame a gospel presentation. I will say more on this below.

For the sake of clarity, I will mention a few evangelical presentations that fit within what I'm calling the “plan of salvation.” These include but are not limited to: *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *the Roman Road*, *Steps to Life*, *The Bridge to Life*, *One Verse Evangelism*, *Steps to Peace with God*, and *Two Ways to Live*. Additionally, one could see the plan of salvation that is summarized in the *ESV Study Bible*. Similar presentations can be found on various church and ministry websites. Even though *Creation-to-Christ (C2C)* uses story more than propositions, the entire presentation functions similarly and draws its emphases from the above theological framework.

A few other observations are worth noting. The following characteristics are typical but not essential in evangelical presentations. Conventional presentations typically focus on individuals and explain *how* a person gets saved.⁸ Furthermore, they are primarily propositional

⁸ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), 110–11.

and heavily Pauline. In other words, they use propositions more than stories and draw more from Paul's letters than the Old Testament and other parts the New Testament.

Is the “Plan of Salvation” Ethical?

By asking the question “Is the Plan of Salvation ethical?,” I do not suggest that this sort of presentation is *immoral*. I also do not challenge any of its theological points. I simply want to analyze its relationship to a disciple's ethical behavior. Does the plan of salvation naturally foster Christian discipleship? Does this understanding of the gospel help us live a moral or godly life?

The Christian life is certainly more than doing good works or living a generally moral life. At the very least, we can say this: even if discipleship refers to more than Christian ethics, it does not mean less. At a minimum, being a disciple means living in a way that reflects the moral character of God manifest in Christ. People sometimes speak of a “gospel-centered” life. Yet, if the gospel does not shape our ethical perspective, then in what sense does the gospel influence the life of a Christian disciple at all?

Traditional gospel presentations mainly concern how an individual can be saved from sin's consequences. Unfortunately, this perspective of the gospel has very little relationship to the disciple's view of morality and mission. In fact, it is possible to argue that a traditional view of the gospel even makes it very difficult to live out the moral life of a Christian disciple.

How do we assess the plan of salvation according to an honor-shame worldview? I will highlight a few observations. These presentations tend to have a few characteristics. I will *first* mention each observation; afterwards, I will offer a few comments. Using an honor-shame perspective, we can see how such presentations may even spur habits of mind that could be deemed immoral or shameful.

1. Individualistic

Generally speaking, the plan of salvation focuses on individuals. It explains how an *individual* gets saved. However, in honor-shame cultures, people are especially mindful of their group. People have a sense of responsibility towards their family or tribe. They understand the importance of loyalty and respect. A person's identity is not defined simply by one's personal distinctions; personal identity also includes the way he or she is *similar* to others.⁹

By focusing on the individual, the plan of salvation makes little of group identity and loyalty. What if a people are very ethnocentric or nationalistic but do not realize it? Not only might they assume that the gospel is foreign propaganda; they may also be full of hate towards certain other nations or tribes (e.g. China vs. Japan). Nothing in the plan of salvation suggests to people that they should examine and repent of their sense of cultural superiority. Sin typically manifests itself in countless social ways; its roots penetrate deep into a person's sense of identity.

The plan of salvation makes too little of the church (i.e. Christian collective identity). As a result, it does not inherently address disciples' sense of identity. With whom do they identify?

⁹ In Chinese, the former is called the “small self” (小我); the latter is dubbed “big self” (大我).

One may not realize that true faith in Christ will manifest itself publicly as he or she becomes loyal to God’s people, i.e. the church. The gospel does not call people merely to “leave” their biological and ancestral family; rather, Christ invites people to be restored to their true, original family—the human family consisting of all nations by faith in Christ.

These conventional presentations lay special stress on the fact that individuals can have eternal life. I’ve heard some western versions of this view that speak of everyone getting his or her own mansion in heaven (based on John 14:2). For many, this sounds dreadfully isolating. To those with a strong sense of collective identity, the emphasis on individual salvation can be distressing. If people have eternal life but not relationship, how can this gospel be good news?

2. Law-language

Most plan-of-salvation presentations emphasize the law theme. As a legal metaphor, God is depicted mainly as a juridical judge, making decisions of guilt and innocence. This imagery is so pervasive that earlier missionaries to China translated the word for “sin” narrowly as “crime.” Therefore, when Chinese hear a typical gospel presentation, they are told that they are “criminals,” much to the confusion of the listeners.

Law is an impersonal metaphor.¹⁰ An authority or official could easily abuse laws to dominate or harm other people.¹¹ Laws can be overly abstract and complex. They might lack flexibility or be open to highly subjective readings.¹² Furthermore, simply because a person conforms to the law and thus is not a “criminal” does not necessarily imply he or she has a right heart, properly honoring God and others. Consequently, laws not only can seem irrelevant to moral decision-making; they may even be used for immorality.

In honor-shame cultures, one’s relationships and reputation are among the chief concerns in a person’s life. People go to great lengths not to “lose face.” In order to preserve one’s reputation and relationships, a person will be willing to break a rule.

3. Works

The plan of salvation tends to assume that one of people’s main problems is “works-righteousness.” In other words, it commonly speaks of our inability to do good works that somehow earn us favor before God. Works do not save a person. Therefore, many gospel

¹⁰ Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 90.

¹¹ For example, we could mention unjust laws in history that sanctioned slavery. More recently, people have questioned the use of law by Chinese leaders. See Minzer, Carl. “What does China Mean by ‘Rule of Law’?” *Foreign Policy* 20 Oct 2014. Accessed 6 March 2015. Online: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/20/what-does-china-mean-by-rule-of-law/>.

¹² For example, in the case of “honor killings”, see Rajeev Dhavan, “What Honour? It’s Cruel Murder: India.” *India Today*. 5 April 2010. Accessed March 6, 2015. Online: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/What+honour+It%27s+cruel+murder/1/91293.html>; Ruggi, Suzanne. “Commodifying Honor in Female Sexuality: Honor Killings in Palestine.” *Middle East Report* 206 (1998): 12–15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3012473>. Also, in China, people have feared legal consequences if they help strangers by being “Good Samaritans.” Cf. Harvey Dzodin, “Nationwide Good Samaritan law needed” *Chinadaily.com.cn*. 17 Jan 2014. Accessed March 6, 2015. Online: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2014-01/17/content_17242681.htm.

presentations focus on *what people do*, not *who people are* (e.g. their title, occupation, social status, family background, etc.).

However, in many cultures, people are not that concerned about God or whether their works will gain them salvation. Rather, they mainly care about their social identity. Concerns like reputation and one's relational network are far more practical. Because of its emphasis on law, the plan of salvation does not emphasize other cultural themes like human relationships and "face." Why then would people think the gospel is relevant or even moral? From the perspective of honor-shame, it once again seems the plan of salvation does not relate to their daily lives.

What happens to faith? Faith inevitably reduces to a belief in certain doctrinal truths about salvation. A set of propositions is unlikely to change the allegiance of a person in honor-shame cultures. It becomes unclear how faith should influence the disciple's daily life in the present. Yet, when we read the Bible through the lens of honor and shame, we are reminded that faith is fundamentally about loyalty. To believe in Christ is to give one's ultimate allegiance to him. In this sense, we understand faith in far more practical terms that direct our present life. We cannot separate the faith that saves us *from* wrath from the faith that saves us *for* good works.

A potentially worse problem has not yet been mentioned. What are the possible consequences when gospel presentations excessively refute salvation by works at the expense of other problems (e.g. the love of money and reputation)? The singular emphasis may unwittingly suggest that doing good works is not all that important to God and the Christian life. Despite the evangelist's good intentions, his or her listeners may get the subtle impression that the gospel and salvation have little or nothing to do with the moral life of a disciple.

James famously reminds us faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). He rebukes the one who doesn't have genuine faith, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" (James 2:14). Similarly, Paul adds, God "saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, . . . so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, *so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works*" (Titus 3:4–8). This leads us to the next observation.

4. Abstract

Those with an honor-shame worldview tend to look at life more holistically. Rather than separating the world into discreet segments, the various areas of one's life are interconnected. Such people tend to be very practical. A person from an honor-shame oriented context will want to know how the gospel affects his or her life.

Traditional gospel presentations primarily stress what people are saved *from*, such as hell and the wrath of God's judgment. This is the overwhelming emphasis of the plan of salvation. Without question, the gospel does save us from the wrath of God (cf. Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10). We should certainly want to warn people from the consequences of sin. However, this only tells

half of the story.

The plan of salvation so emphasizes what people are saved *from* that it neglects what they are saved *for*. The church, like Israel in the Old Testament, was chosen *for* a purpose, not merely to escape from some negative experience. In Eph 2:8–10, Paul ties these two aspects of salvation together (though I find people often quote v. 10 less than vv. 8–9). Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

Given the strong one-sided emphasis of the plan of salvation, what would be a natural implication? This sort of gospel presentation indirectly focuses people’s attention on what they should *not* do. Not only can they *not* do works to be saved; they also should be concerned to *avoid* divine punishment. This negative perspective inevitably frames how they generally regard works in relation to the gospel and the Christian life. One’s view of moral works tends to be negative, not positive. It can foster too much passivity with respect to ethics. That is, the plan of salvation does not highlight a positive vision for a person’s current life such that they would be proactively compelled to live for Christ’s sake as disciples. Because of the unbalanced emphasis on *conversion* and what people are saved from, listeners will have difficulty understanding what the gospel has to do being a *disciple*. For all practical purposes, the gospel and discipleship are too separated because of a minimalistic view of salvation.

Given what has been said, we should not be surprised by the following observation. The plan of salvation sharply separates this life and the next life and perhaps material things and immaterial things. For instance, one popular method of evangelism opens by asking people to think about what happens after they die, “Do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in Heaven?”¹³ When hearing such talk, many from honor-shame cultures will regard this presentation as otherworldly, abstract, and philosophical. In short, it’s not practical.

By sharply dichotomizing this life and the next life, the plan of salvation seems to trivialize the importance of moral decision making, including related things like relationships, authority and “face.” Christian obedience can quickly get reduced to one single ministry—evangelism. Social ministries are then seen as marginal problems, which concern this life and not eternal life. Clearly, this far-sighted understanding of the gospel does not encourage biblical discipleship.

5. Pragmatic¹⁴

The plan of salvation is prone to underemphasize the cost of being a Christian. Amid promises of peace and eternal life, listeners are ill prepared to accept the cost of discipleship that comes with truly believing the gospel. Inevitably, Christ’s followers will lose relationships. Their reputations will suffer. Like those in Heb 11, they suffer varying degrees of public shame. Jesus’

¹³ “Steps to Life.” Accessed 6 March 2015. Online: <http://evangelismexplosion.org/resources/steps-to-life/step-1-do-you-know/>.

¹⁴ “Pragmatic” here implies something more narrow than “practical.” The former connotes the use of means to satisfy an overly restrictive set of goals.

words in Luke 14:25–33 are especially poignant when we consider that he speaks to large crowds of people who considered whether to follow him. He warns that disciples must “hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life” (v. 26).

Someone who is sensitive to honor and shame is well aware that their actions affect those around them. Decisions are measured in light of the group. How will this or that action influence relationships? Unfortunately, traditional presentations do not address some of the most important concerns of people living in honor-shame cultures.

For example, it would be natural for someone to ask, “Will I be left without a group to belong to?” Given the characteristics already observed above, the plan of salvation does little to reconstruct a person’s honor-shame perspective in light of Christ. There is a basic rule to honor and shame: when someone’s collective identity changes, (s)he gets honor from one group but is shamed by the other. Thus, if someone wants honor in the eyes of God and his people, they will have to accept the fact that they will be rejected by others, many whom they love.

What are the consequences of presenting a shame-less gospel? First, such presentations superficially satisfy pragmatic desires to get “face.” That is, people treat Christianity merely *as a means* to get honor and blessing. They do not realize that the gospel should transform their worldview. In some situations, the desire to save face in front of others (like the evangelist, family, friends) will result in false conversions. They will outwardly engage in rituals like the “sinners prayer” to avoid disapproval.

Similarly, because many honor-shame cultures tend to appreciate the power of ritual, a person may actually think the sinner’s prayer can save them. In other words, they are fooled by words that suggest that they will be saved simply by praying a certain kind of prayer. Sadly, by oversimplifying gospel presentations, we may inadvertently deceive people, making them think they can be saved through the sinner’s prayer. Yet, these people perhaps do not have true faith!

Finally, for some people, the plan of salvation can look like a “bait and switch” sales technique. Although these gospel presentations promise blessing and honor, following Christ in fact leads to suffering. Sadly, these presentations can easily nurture an “easy-believism,” since they have not had to count the cost of true faith. Therefore, many will profess to be Christians when in fact they are not really saved. In the very least, if their faith is genuine, the growth as disciples may be severely stunted by the shock of suffering. On the other hand, by offering a worldview change, people have the genuine opportunity to count the cost of discipleship.

Honor and Shame are Essential for Making Disciples

Our primary goal is to discern how honor and shame ought to shape our view of discipleship and thus leadership development. To answer this question, we have taken an indirect path. We used an honor-shame lens to examine the implications of the plan of salvation for discipleship. In so doing, we identified potential blind spots or weaknesses in discipleship that can result from traditional gospel presentations. How might the above critique make a positive

contribution to the church’s effort to make disciples (not merely converts)?

First, evangelism and discipleship methods need to address more clearly the fact that following Christ means changing one’s primary group identity. Otherwise, we do not set people up well for being disciples; at best, we merely create converts who mistakenly think Christian faith is a private matter. In fact, because Christ is King of all nations, it is essentially public in nature. An honor-shame perspective corrects individualism whereby Christians think the church is simply a volunteer social organization. Also, it highlights that we belong to a new family. Our birth family and ethnicity no longer determine our most fundamental identity. In short, honor-shame may be God’s “plan of salvation” for rescuing the church from individualistic Christianity.

Second, by regaining a sense of collective identity, the church is set free from the fear of shame. Christ’s followers belong to a community that shares a radically new sense of honor and shame. Therefore, they no longer esteem the praise of the world (cf. Rom 2:28–29). God receives those who are rejected by the world. The biblical writers grasp the practical importance of perspective. For example, David deSilva observes that 1 Peter gives “us a window into how a leader within a minority culture deflects the majority culture’s attempts to impose shame as a ‘corrective’ measure, thus nurturing the continued life and witness of the minority culture.”¹⁵

Third, when understood through the lens of honor and shame, the gospel transforms one’s entire worldview. Honor and shame provide a holistic framework for seeing the world that does not fragment a person’s life into independent parts. With one’s whole life—whether we eat, drink, or whatever we do—the Christian seeks to give God “face”, i.e. magnify God’s worth. When this becomes the fundamental goal of life, “normal” is redefined. People adjust how they spend money and their time. Young disciples will not wilt under social pressure to marry unbelievers; if necessary, they will remain single (unmarried) despite the criticism of family and friends. They do not want to bring shame upon God’s name or His people. Therefore, Christians resist the temptation to compromise when they suffer persecution. Naturally, whenever they preach the gospel, they will make clear the cost of following Christ, being wary of superficial professions of conversion.

Fourth, an honor-shame perspective clarifies the nature of true faith. Thus, Christian faith is inherently public. It is more than affirming a few abstract propositions. The gospel calls disciples to give *allegiance* to the King of kings. When faith is understood as allegiance, the gospel becomes very practical. Not surprisingly, disciples must not overlook the issue of “face,” i.e. one’s public reputation or respect. Whose “face” do we seek? On what basis do we want a good reputation? In John 5:44, Jesus essentially defines faith in terms of seeking glory: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” By seeking to please God and His people (rather than the world), our lives will be transformed. This is because true faith—like that of Abraham—publically glorifies God for his power and faithfulness (cf. Rom 4:20–21).

¹⁵ David A. deSilva, “Turning Shame into Honor: The Pastoral Strategy of 1 Peter,” in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society*, ed. Wayne L. Alloway Jr, Robert Jewett, and John G. Lacey (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2010), 164.

Fifth, churches are reminded not to settle for superficial measures of success. Pastors and missionaries regularly face the temptation to judge their worth by the size of their churches or the number of their converts. These are visible standards of achievement that typically win the Christian leader the applause of his or her peers and supervisors. Yet, God is often most glorified in the most inconspicuous ways. The fruits of the Spirit are not quantifiable (Gal 5:22). God told Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in advance that people would reject their message, yet they persevered for the sake of God's honor. By taking honor and shame seriously, the church does not lose hope because we are reminded that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2; cf. 11:36–39).

Finally, we need to rethink how we train and assess leaders. In order that the conclusion of this paper might begin an ongoing, constructive process of reflection and application, I will now pose a series of questions that follow naturally from all that has been said. Do our training methods emphasize mere conformity or true obedience? What motivates disciples to obey—God's honor or merely "face" in the eyes of a social group? Do our ministry strategies stress efficiency to achieve a narrow set of goals or do they seek to honor God holistically in every part of life and society? Do we restrict ministry to only one kind of activity (e.g. evangelism)? How do we do theological education? Do our assignments challenge students' worldview (in relation to honor and shame) or can they pass our tests as long as they have good memorization skills? Are we equipping the entire body of Christ for the work of ministry (cf. Eph 4:12) or are we making the church too dependent on us? What are the results of our training? Are people afraid to confess sin and admit their ignorance and weakness? Are we developing leaders who seek worldly honor? If so, we need a greater sense of shame.