

ATONEMENT AND COMMUNITY RECONCILIATION IN PAUL'S LETTERS: THE SHAME OF THE CROSS AS THE MEANS FOR RESTORATION

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Introduction

The mission of Paul the Apostle was effective in part because of his ability to identify with his Greco-Roman audiences and communicate to them in culturally relevant ways. One of the core cultural values that guided life in the Mediterranean region of the first century was the importance of honor and shame. Paul appealed to this cultural force in writing and in person as he attempted to “become all things to all people” and use whatever appropriate method he could to save them (1 Cor 9:22). Many of his letters tackle the division, false teachings, and immoral living plaguing many early churches. He strategically attempted to isolate sinners and shame them into changing their ways in order to conform to what he considered the place of honor before God. He did this not only to preserve the holiness and integrity of the church, but also with hope in grace that the sinners would realize their problems, repent, and return to the church with restored honor.

What guided Paul's imperative for community reconciliation was a dynamic understanding of the indicative of what Jesus Christ did through his sacrificial death on the cross. Atonement language stands in the background contextually and thematically of many of the places where Paul attempted to correct the wayward. Sinners can be restored to honor because of the shame Christ took upon himself in their behalf. The atonement of Christ is the primary resource for restoring broken people and broken relationships. Simply stated, Paul used theology to develop stronger community.

I. The Social Force of Shame

Shame was a powerful social force in the first century that isolated people and could lead to ruined relationships. Honor for Paul comes in one's relationship to God in Christ and not how culture defines honor as power and position. He also uses shame to put social pressure on those who were not living up to his expectations.

A. Shame as Ethical Motivation

Honor and shame are social constructs: others decide when they are to be given.¹ They are reciprocal social forces: when people have enough positive social rating, they reach a position of honor, but shame results when expected honor is removed or lost.² Aristotle called honor the greatest of all goods (*Eth. nic.* 4.3.9-12). Honor is a limited good: "No more honor is available in a given society than already exists."³ Persons in the first-century Mediterranean region had "dyadic personalities" whereby their worth and identity were determined by others.⁴ In group-oriented cultures like this, the group can exert tremendous pressure upon individuals to control their behavior.⁵ Shame results if one does not agree with the expectations of the group.⁶ Honor is given to those who fulfill certain expectations or roles within a group. A group or someone in the place of honor (such as a patron) can cast shame

¹ Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 27.

² Malina, *The New Testament World*, 26.

³ Walter F. Taylor, *Paul, Apostle to the Nations: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 42.

⁴ Taylor, *Paul, Apostle to the Nations*, 43.

⁵ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

⁶ Bruce Malina, "The Individual and the Community: Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9 no. 3 (July 1979): 127-28.

upon persons for not meeting these expectations, but it is really the persons who bring shame upon themselves.

The family (*oikos*) was the most significant place to find worth. In relationships of fictive kinship, as we find in the Pauline churches, the church as God's *oikos* determined one's honor and how one ought to behave (1 Tim 3:15). As a corollary, the *oikos* could also decide one's shame. The Pauline letters provide a number of household codes that layout the expectations within God's *oikos* (Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; Titus 2:1-10). Honor was crucial for participation and smooth relationships within the household.⁷

The social boundaries for acceptable behavior (what is "honorable," Phil 4:8-9) are determined by "what is proper for a certain place at a certain time . . . with regard to society's view of an orderly and safe world."⁸ Unacceptable behavior makes one dangerous to a group because it threatens the cohesion of the group. People come to know the boundaries of a group through socialization.⁹ Much of the conflict within Pauline churches resulted from the fluctuation of group boundaries as the church incorporated new people from diverse backgrounds. Paul brought with him his socialization as a Jew but was willing to accommodate this for the sake of evangelism.

B. Shame as an Isolating Force

Actions in shame-based cultures are determined by external sanctions formed in the course of human opinion, whereas in guilt-based cultures, values are determined by internalized convictions of sin.¹⁰ One way to bring shame to a person is through isolation

⁷ N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1992), 10.

⁸ David Aurther deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2000), 243.

⁹ Jerome Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 23-24.

¹⁰ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1946), 223.

from the group. Without the group association, the individual develops a sense of abandonment. The group can sanction the behavior of its members, which can lead to a loss of social position and lower one's self-worth, result in shame, or worse, destroy one's reason for existence. Shame before the group may be worse than death in many cultures, which is one reason why suicide is viewed as a better alternative than facing shame before the group. The Greek word *aischynomai* carries this strong public sense of isolation.¹¹ Lyn Bechtel makes this distinction between shame and guilt:

The feeling of shame is a response to failure or inability to live up to internalized ideals, social identifications, and roles inculcated by parents and society, which dictate expectations of what a person 'should' be able to do, be, know, or feel. . . . In contrast, guilt is a response to a transgression against internalized societal or parental prohibitions or against boundaries that form an internal authority, the conscience. . . . Shame stimulates fear of psychological or physical rejection (lack of belonging), abandonment, expulsion, or loss of social position and relies predominantly on eternal pressure from an individual or group.¹²

No culture is completely shame or guilt based, but all have a mixture of the two.¹³ Shame and guilt are related. Shame by a group can lead to a psychological sense of guilt. Guilt may develop when individuals realize that they have associated themselves with the wrong behavior or belief. If their identity with a group is strong enough, their shame before this group may force them to rethink how they have behaved. Thus, the group has a vital role in developing the conscience of the individuals within that group. Individuals may feel more guilt when their actions become public

¹¹ A. Horstmann, "aischynomai, be ashamed," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), vol. 1, pages 42-43.

¹² Lyn M. Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame within Divine-Human Relationships in Biblical Israel," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 80.

¹³ Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is influencing the way we think about and discuss theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 80.

and it is clear to the group that they have transgressed acceptable standards.¹⁴ Developing the conscience may require individuals to go against cultural patterns or personal desires (Paul often refers to these as *epithymia* [“lust”] and *sarx* [“flesh”] when controlled by the power of sin) in order to follow the standards of the smaller group (such as a church). Although the conscience is crucial in guilt-based cultures, it still has a role in shame-based cultures. In many cases, it will need nurturing and developing so that the individuals within a group can become more aware of specific expectations and standards of this group and are able to stand against the pressures of larger cultural forces. The group sets the values for the individuals within that group and establishes a “court of reputation,” the sole body of significant others who approve or disapprove what should be important to the individual.¹⁵

C. Developing an Ethic of Honor

Shame is a significant force for controlling aggressive or undesirable behaviors in dyadistic cultures.¹⁶ The group will put pressure on errant individuals to force them to conform to expected behaviors and beliefs. People will behave in certain ways in order to avoid shame and preserve their reputations. This may involve giving up certain behaviors and embracing those viewed as honorable in the dominant culture.¹⁷

The early Christians came from different group associations. For Gentile believers, their new faith in Christ required removing themselves from many of the social, religious, and political voluntary associations found in the Roman Empire. The church provided a new association with new identities,

¹⁴ Jakob A. Loewen, “The Social Context of Guilt and Forgiveness,” *Practical Anthropology* 17:2 (March-April 1970), 82.

¹⁵ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, and Purity*, 55.

¹⁶ Lyn M. Bechtel, “Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming,” *JSOT* 49 (1991), 81.

¹⁷ David Aurthur deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation*, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999), 6.

forming a new social unit (Eph 4:17-24).¹⁸ Jewish believers, already separated from many of the Greco-Roman groups as a subgroup of their own organized around local synagogues, found themselves associating with Gentiles in the church, creating tensions with their Jewish roots (see Eph 2:11-22). These early Christians had to make a choice between shame before their former groups by associating with the church or shame before God and the church because they failed to follow the new paradigm of new life in Christ. To accept honor before God and shame before the world potentially brought persecution.¹⁹ Paul's letters are full of insider/outsider language that forges a third identity of *ekklēsia* as the body of Christ and creates a special bond of belonging (Gal 3:26-29).²⁰

It is crucial in newly formed groups for this sense of group belonging to be well defined so that members have a clear self-identity and are able to bring new members into their group. This was accomplished in the early church by the personal presence of important and honored figures such as the apostles, the presence of their emissaries, and the power of language in letter writing. A person in the position of authority, power, or prestige within a shame-based culture has the ability to sanction an individual who has gone beyond the group boundaries. Paul functioned as the primary representative of Christ and the gospel to the churches he founded (1 Cor 4:15) and for those colleagues whom he mentored (2 Tim 2:13). In his letters, he is essentially remapping the zone of what counts as honorable and shameful. He often develops the honorable ethic in the thanksgiving sections of his letters where he thanks God for the very attributes he hopes to see in the churches (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4-9; Col 1:3-8; 1 Thess 1:2-10; 2:13-16).²¹ His lists of vices and virtues essentially determine the boundary

¹⁸ Wayne O. McCready, "Ekklēsia and Voluntary Associations," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 59-73.

¹⁹ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, and Purity*, 47.

²⁰ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 86.

²¹ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, and Purity*, 58.

between insiders and outsiders. The next section explores what happened when group members in the Pauline churches transgressed the boundary demarcating honor and shame.

II. Paul's Rhetoric of Reconciliation

Paul attempts at a number of places in his letters to bring shame upon those within the churches who transgressed the essential boundary of the truth of the gospel and a holy ethic consistent with this truth. He shames the wayward by isolating them from fellowship with the church with the goal of having them feel shame to the point of seeking the grace and forgiveness of God. He takes the risk in these places that the shamed will return to fellowship. This risk is based on the full confidence in the power of Christ's atoning sacrifice that offers the restoration of honor before God and the church for those who repent. Not all passages will reveal this strategy as a whole but each provides further insight into his thinking.

A. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

In 1 Cor 5:1, Paul writes rather harsh and sarcastic words about a man in the church who was having incestuous sexual relations with his father's wife. This sort of behavior was not even accepted among pagans.²² Paul is flabbergasted that the church remained complacent about this man and had done nothing to censure his behavior. Paul cannot even call this man a "brother" early in this passage, simply "someone" (*tina*, v 2). He passes judgment on the man from a distance and urges the assembled Corinthian church to remove this man from fellowship and hand him over to Satan "for the destruction of his flesh" (v. 5). The phrase "the destruction of the flesh" has been much debated.

²² For ancient references, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 385.

Thiselton has argued that that it refers to the “self-glorifying or self-satisfaction” of the offender and perhaps also of the community.²³

The only way this man can come to this recognition is if he still attaches some value to the opinions of the group, if indeed he has tasted the light of the gospel through his fellowship with the Christians in Corinth (Heb 6:4). Satan will be the instrument of this recognition because Satan was shamed by Christ who disarmed the power and authorities, making a public spectacle over them on the cross (Col 2:15). Satan and those who follow his ways face the ultimate shame of isolation from God and God’s purposes. Essentially, the sin of this man must be exposed for what it is—so shameful that it was not even accepted by unbelievers in that culture. Paul may have been hoping for the development of the man’s conscience by creating a sense of guilt based on the shame he would experience in being isolated from the group that was providing some meaning to his life. Apparently, this man claimed to be a Christian (v. 11) but his actions contradicted the type of lifestyle that comes in response to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (6:19-20). The church must acknowledge this shameful behavior by essentially isolating this man from the group in hope that he will eventually be eschatologically saved.²⁴

Noteworthy is what Paul writes next. In the middle of his discussion of how to deal with this man (vv. 1-5, 9-13), he gives the theological reason for this shaming (vv. 6-8). He does not want the evil influence of this man’s behavior to spread throughout the church like leaven spreads in dough (v. 6). To support this, he uses atonement language and a reference to the sacrifice of Christ as our Passover lamb (v. 7) who gave his life so that the church can be pure and in a place of honor before God by living with “sincerity and truth” (v. 8). Accepting shameful behavior (“malice and wickedness,” v. 8) within the church contradicts what Christ has done.

²³ Anthony C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of *Sarx* in 1 Cor. 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,” *SJT* 26 (1973), 225-26.

²⁴ J. Gundry-Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*, WUNT 2:37 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990), 113-20.

Paul has already laid out in the letter the cross as the ultimate source of honor before God. In the context of the first century, dying on a Roman cross was a sign of weakness and foolishness (1:18, 23; Luke 16:1-8). Such physical exposure brought great shame to those executed in this way.²⁵ Paul reverses this notion and shows that the divine paradox is that the cross is the very power and wisdom of God (Matt 20:16).²⁶ The cross actually exposes the shame (*kataischynē*) of the wisdom and strength of humanity (v. 27). Those who accept the message of the cross experience “righteousness, holiness and redemption” (v. 30).

These ideas surely stand in the background as Paul continues in 5:9-13 to direct the church to avoid any fellowship with those who claim to be Christians yet live like the world. Such people must be expelled from the church so their influence will not spread and bring shame to the whole group before God. Throughout chapters 5-7, Paul lays out the boundary of acceptable and honorable behavior for the church in relation to sexual ethics. He remains optimistic that those caught up in sin can change. This change comes through the sanctification and justification “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (6:11).

B. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Many interpreters consider 2 Cor 2:5-11 to be the outcome of Paul’s directions in 1 Cor 5:5 and that the immoral man did indeed see the fault of his behavior and wanted to return to fellowship in the church. But there is no way to verify this assumption exegetically. Paul uses generic terms like “anyone” (*tis*) or the pronouns he/him, raising the possibility of this being a general principle, but the use of details assumes that the church knows the person to whom Paul is referring.

²⁵ Robert Jewett, “Paul, Shame, and Honor,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 558.

²⁶ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 88.

Several words need clarification in this passage. The “grief” (*lypeō*, pain, sorrow, or irritation) appears to be mental or emotional but exhibits itself relationally. The exact reason this person has caused Paul and the Corinthians anguish is not stated. The repetition of the verb *charizomai* (to pardon, show grace, be forgiving) five times in these verses (vv. 7, 10) suggests it was some sort of sin that affected the church. Such a sin could have two impacts: it could ruin the internal cohesion of the fellowship of the church in some sort of divisive activity, or harm the witness of the church before outsiders. What is clear is that the church has the ability to restore this person to full fellowship.

A second word is “punishment” (*epitimia*, v. 6). The clues in this passage imply that this was some sort of rejection or withholding of love since Paul directs the church to reaffirm their love for the person. This punishment was given by the majority (v. 6) and led to the man’s excessive sorrow (v. 7). These details fit well with the scenario of a person who had been cut off from close fellowship with the group, resulting in a sense of shame leading to “excessive sorrow” (v. 7).

There are two possible results. One is that the church could continue rejecting the man, but this would lead to victory by Satan (v. 11). This implies that Satan can use shame to defeat a person spiritually if the church does not act to restore a person when the person’s conscience has been pricked to the point of sorrow and repentance. The other result is that the person could be fully restored to a place of honor within the group and reaffirmed in love. The only way to do this, as Paul wisely knew, is through forgiveness.

Paul does not use any specific language related to atonement in this passage, but if we look at his wider arguments and keep in mind the progression of his thought, we can see his theological underpinnings. He is greatly concerned in this letter about reconciliation, especially between himself and the Corinthians, and between unbelievers and God. He finds himself defending his ministry plans in chapter 1. His message has always been consistent: Jesus is the “yes” of God; in other words, what God promises in Christ will happen, and this is confirmed by the

presence of the Holy Spirit (1:18-22). This optimism continues in 2:14-15 where Paul uses the illustration of the parades after Roman victories that were filled with the sweet smell of incense and perfume. To the conquered, these parades brought great shame and ended in execution, and the sweet aromas meant death. To the victorious, the smells of the parade meant honor. At the heart of Paul's mission was to be "the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2:15). Salvation through Christ results in honor before God (3:4) but not before people (3:1).

Paul adds further theological support for reconciliation by comparing the ministry of Moses to that of Christ in 3:7-18. The veil of the old covenant and its system of atonement bring separation and shame before God (Rom 7:5, 9) resulting in death (2 Cor 3:7). The law and its regulations cannot restore one to a right relationship with God (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:11). The new covenant inaugurated by Christ leads to glory and honor before God (Rom 10:4; Gal 2:16, 21; 3:13). Those who believe are transformed into Christ's likeness through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). This is the place of highest honor and the goal for believers (4:4, 6).

In chapter 4, Paul goes on to defend his ministry, which appears shameful before the world because of his suffering, but in the end will be vindicated in honor before God with eternal glory (4:17) because of resurrection (4:14). He illustrates in this chapter that people who have experienced shame can return to Christ and fellowship within the church by renouncing shameful ways (4:2). Paul is hoping to prick the consciences of the Corinthians so that they will accept him, just as they are to accept the repentant brother. He in essence is redefining honor and shame in this chapter. Suffering is viewed as shameful before the world and was one of the reasons Paul's ministry was criticized by his opponents. Carrying around the shameful death of Christ in our bodies (4:10) ultimately results in eternal life and honor before God (4:17-18). Paul wants this church to view reconciliation as the means to restore honor. Believing in Christ's personal sacrifice brings new life and honor. The phrase "present us with you to himself" in v.

14 expresses the hoped-for unity that will result from the Corinthians accepting Christ's atonement as the badge of honor. The honor and shame language in relationship to reconciliation continues in chapter 5 with the use of the metaphor of body as a tent, which though wasting away in this life, will be clothed in honor at the resurrection.

After this significant theological excursion, Paul returns to the theme of reconciliation in 5:11-21. Because Christ "died for all" (v. 14), a new way of life characterized by his self-giving love is possible. With his love in us (reading *tou Christou* as a subjective genitive), we see people as potentialities (v. 16) because God's grace can make them new creations (v. 17). No one is beyond Christ's reconciling power. The atonement language gets specific in v. 19: "not counting their sins against them." This is even more explicit in v. 21: "[God] made the one who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf in order that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Because Christ has made it possible for any sinner to be reconciled with God, and thus in a position of honor before him, he has commissioned his followers to carry out this same mission of reconciliation (vv. 18-20). When the context and argument of the first five chapters of 2 Corinthians are considered, it becomes clear that the source for reconciling sinners to the church and to God is through what Christ has done by giving himself in our behalf. Paul is redefining honor in terms of Christ's atonement. It is not accidental that Paul brings up the subject of accepting the wayward brother back into fellowship. This situation fits in well with the overall purpose of his letter.

C. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

In 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15, Paul once again instructs a church to ostracize certain people who do not live up to his standard for honor. The reason not to associate with such people is that they do nothing but disrupt the group (v. 6) and do not follow Paul's teaching (vv. 6, 14). The intended outcome of this disassociation (*synanamignysthai*, used also in 1 Cor 5:11) is so that (*hina*) they will feel ashamed (*entrapē*, v. 15). The assumption is that this

shame will cause them to see their error, thus prick their consciences so that they will repent and rejoin the church with acceptable thinking and behavior. This rejection and shaming should be done out of love and for the benefit of the errant, not out of spite (v. 15).

This short letter is missing specific atonement language, but some of the same themes as Paul's other letters lie in the background. Paul is not so concerned about the content of the message as he is about keeping true to the message. He already made clear the core message in the first letter (1 Thess 1:10; 4:14; 5:10). Like 2 Corinthians, this letter attempts to encourage the church to remain steadfast in the midst of persecution (1:4), with the result of being counted worthy (or honored, *kataxiōthēnai*) before God when Christ comes again (1:5, 11-12; Eph 4:1; Phil 1:27; Col 1:10). The key decision the Thessalonians must make is to agree with Paul's teachings and accept the gospel (1:8, 10; 2:15). The letter is concerned with faithfulness to orthodoxy over against lawlessness and deceivers who think they deserve honor (2:4). Paul essentially shames anyone who follows this heresy and urges the Thessalonians to go the way of honor, even if it means suffering. Through their faithfulness to Paul's teaching, the gospel of Christ will develop a good reputation and be honored (*doxazētai*) by others (3:1). Paul's goal is for everyone "to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth," and to share in "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:13-14).

D. 1 Timothy 1:18-20

In 1 Tim 1:18-20, Paul (the assumed author) reminds Timothy to hold true to the faith and a good conscience as he faced opposition in Ephesus. Some people, including Hymenaeus and Alexander, had rejected these and shipwrecked their faith. Paul's response to this type of rejection was to hand such people over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (v. 20). Three significant thoughts are embedded in these directions. The first is that some people had deviated from the accepted truth of the gospel as taught

by Paul (1:3-7; 4:1-3, 7; 6:20-21). Faithfulness to the gospel is a major theme in this letter. Paul uses the article with *pistin* in v. 19, likely referring to the content of what is believed, namely the gospel. Any teaching contrary to the apostolic faith must be rejected. Hymenaeus and Alexander, and others like them, made the conscious decision to go a different way from the truth taught by Paul to the Ephesians. They essentially put themselves outside of the group for which Paul was attempting to define orthodoxy. They did not realize that their position was actually one of shame, and so Paul hoped that by cutting them off from the group, they would realize their faulty thinking. Second, Paul was in the position as leader to shame Hymenaeus and Alexander, minimally by naming them here, but it is assumed that their rejection was public knowledge and the Ephesian church, through Timothy's instruction, would act on Paul's example and reject similar people from the fellowship. Third, Paul's intention in this shaming was so that the consciences of these two would be developed to the point of realizing that they were headed in the wrong direction (cf. 4:2). Like 1 Cor 5:5, Satan again is the instrument by which this realization would come. The word "taught" assumes that they would make a change and no longer reject ("blaspheme") the Pauline gospel. This scenario fits what Paul did in other situations.

It is significant that Paul's directions to Timothy here are embedded between two references to what Christ has done: 1:15 and 2:5-6. Paul personalizes the gospel in both places. In the first passage, he offers himself as example of one who had himself been a blasphemer and in a position of shame before Christ (vv. 13, 16). Even in this rejected state, Paul was shown mercy and patience by Christ (v. 13). The only way Christ could ever appoint someone like Paul to his service was out of grace (v. 14). Paul's extreme position of being the worst of sinners and yet forgiven and called to be an apostle highlights the profound change that can take place for those shamed before God. Anyone in Ephesus, including Hymenaeus and Alexander, could experience this change of status as well.

The second passage continues this optimism but expands it to include "all people" (2:1, 4). No one is beyond the restorative

grace of God in Christ. The atonement language in this second passage becomes more explicit. Christ Jesus brings two alienated parties together by serving as the perfect mediator and ransom. As mediator, he perfectly represents God to humanity (3:16; Heb 2:12), and as the ransom, he brings humanity to God (2 Cor 5:21). The aorist tense of the substantival participle *who gave himself (hodos)* reflects back on the key salvific event of Christ's death on the cross (Phil 2:7-8; Gal 4:4-5; Rom 8:3; Heb 2:14). The *hapax legomenon* ἀντίλυτρον refers to the exchange price paid to free captive slaves. In this case, Christ gave his own life as the ransom price (Mark 10:45; Gal 1:4; 2:20; Eph 5:2). He took upon himself through death the shame of judgment, bringing reconciliation to shamed humanity through his resurrection (Heb 12:2). Paul is totally optimistic and has experienced firsthand that this good news can transfer anyone (*hyper pantōn*, 1 Tim 2:6) to a place of honor before God. It is crucial that the church maintain this truth against any onslaught of shameful heresy that distorts it. There is hope for those who find themselves outside of this truth if they will embrace "the faith and a good conscience" (1:19).

E. 2 Timothy 2:25-26

This same idea is echoed in 2 Tim 2:25-26. This letter is full of honor and shame language and imagery. These verses further reveal Paul's strategy for restoring the wayward. First, he expresses his optimism that those who are in a position of shame can change. The polemical language is strong in this letter as he delineates and isolates the opponents in Ephesus. His own testimony of transformation (1 Tim 1:12-17) still rings in the background (2 Tim 1:9), but the stress in this letter is more on remaining faithful to the truth of the gospel. Apparently Timothy was unsuccessful in removing all the problem people in Ephesus after receiving the first letter, and so Paul directs him here to "humbly teach" them so that they will return to orthodoxy (v. 25). There is no shame language used here, but shaming is what Paul essentially does in this letter with the many descriptions of those who oppose the gospel. If Timothy follows through with Paul's

strong rhetoric, he will inevitably be shaming those opposed to Paul's message. What is noteworthy is that the opponents can repent and return to the truth by coming to their senses (v. 26). Essentially, they must develop a "good conscience" (1 Tim 1:19) so that they are aware of the truth. Again, Paul mentions the deceiver ("devil," v. 26) who traps those who have forsaken orthodoxy.

Atonement language is not particularly abundant in this letter possibly because Timothy already knows Paul's message (1:13; 2:2). Rather, Paul simply reminds Timothy of some essential truths of the gospel that Timothy must make sure the Ephesian church knows well. Communicating this sound doctrine in Ephesus would be the primary way Timothy could isolate and correct the opponents (2:14). The core content of Paul's preaching is alluded to in 1:9-10. The thoughts of these verses echo other passages in the Pauline Epistles, especially Ephesians, and are a brief summary of Paul's gospel in application to the problems in Ephesus. They are expressed almost in creedal form and are ideas that the Ephesians should have clearly known. (1) God's purpose for humanity is to experience salvation in Christ and live this out in holiness (1:9a; Eph 1:3-4). (2) This salvation comes as a matter of grace and not works (1:9b; Eph 2:8-9). (3) God had salvation through Christ planned before creation (1:9c; Eph 1:4). (4) Christ Jesus embodied salvation through his death, and through his resurrection brought victory over death and immortality (1:10; Eph 1:20; 2:6). Paul gives a second condensed statement of his gospel in 2:8: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David." Compromising this message, like the opponents had, or avoiding shame before the world out of fear of persecution results in shame (1:8, 12). Honor comes in following Paul's example of faithfulness even to the point of suffering (3:10-11). This faithfulness is shown through godly living, which should expect persecution by the world (3:12). The greatest honor of the eschatological crown of righteousness remains for those who are faithful to the gospel (4:8). The resource for this honorable life of godliness is the Spirit of God (1:7).

F. Titus 3:9-10

Titus faced the similar issue of false teachers in Crete as Timothy did in Ephesus. Titus had a two-part mission: to encourage the church and its leaders in the truth of the gospel, and to refute those who reject this truth (1:9). In 3:9-10, Paul issues clear directions of what to do with the latter, in possible echo of Jesus' directions in Matt 18:15-17. Titus should warn two times heretics (*hairesitikos*) who are caught up in false doctrines (v. 9), and if they do not listen, have nothing to do with them. "Warn" (*nouthesia*) is a positive term that denotes giving instruction in order to help someone turn from the wrong way to the right.²⁷ Once again, Paul begins with optimism, but there comes a point when such people must be rejected (NASB, KJV) or expelled (*paraitou*) from fellowship in order to preserve the integrity of the gospel and the church. The warning and public exposure should result in shame. Paul does not explicitly say here what the intended effect of this shunning is, but *nouthesia* assumes some type of correction, and by implication, restoration.

Much clearer in the context is how one can be in the position of honor. These verses come at the end of a long section beginning in 2:1 in which Paul defines the boundary for honor and shame through a list of vices and virtues for different groups within the church. At various points in this list, he urges the Cretans to develop an honorable reputation before outsiders resulting in a positive witness to God's grace in Christ (2:5, 8, 10). The transfer from shame (the position of the false teachers, 1:10-16) to honor (orthodox Christians, 2:1) comes by Christ "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (2:14). This significant statement captures the Pauline view of

²⁷ Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 679; Johannes Behm, "noeō," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4: 1021-22.

atonement. Christ gave himself “in our behalf” (*hyper hēmōn*) by taking our shame upon himself on the cross, freeing us from the control of sin and the lifestyle that brings shame before God and other people. The result of his sacrifice is that we are enabled through the presence of his Spirit to live holy and godly lives.

Paul expands this idea in 3:4-7 and echoes many themes from other letters. This creedal sentence is one of the most concise Trinitarian statements on salvation in the New Testament: (1) the love of God appeared in the person of Jesus Christ; (2) God saved us by mercy and not according to our works; (3) this salvation comes through the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit; (4) this is all possible through Jesus Christ our Savior, and (5) it results in our justification and eternal life. Believing in this is “excellent and profitable” (3:8), in other words, the position of honor. Distorting or trivializing this message brings shame upon the church (3:9). This letter echoes other Pauline letters by showing that the primary way honor is restored and shame is removed is through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Accepting this “faith” (1:4, 13; 2:2; 3:15) and living it out in holiness and godliness removes shame before God, the church, and unbelievers.

III. Honor through Christ’s Atonement

Paul’s goal in confronting sinners was always reconciliation with God and with the church. The theological resource for restoring relationships is Christ’s identification in shame with sinners. At the core of sin is a rejection of the law of love (1 John 5:3), and so as a result, sin brings alienation with God and with other people. The story of Adam and Eve in Gen 2-3 sets the paradigm. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve felt no shame because they lived in perfect harmony with God and each other (Gen 2:25). After their disobedience, the first thing they realized was their shame. So, they sewed fig clothes together to hide their shame from each other (3:7), and then they hid from God (3:8). When Paul writes that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22), he is referring to the inherited consequence of this shameful act. Each of us stands in shame before one another and God because we are

exposed in our rebellion and rejection. From the perspective of a dyadistic, collective culture, as a race we have robbed God of his honor (1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:18).²⁸ As a form of shame, sin can be defined as a social ill manifested in brokenness and isolation. Sin is a transgression against acceptable boundaries stated in God's laws and results in dishonor before God, ourselves, and others (Rom 2:23). "God's righteousness not only declares us forensically guilty, it also places us as relationally distant and shamed before the Triune God."²⁹ At the heart of this rebellion is seeking honor that should only be given to God (Rom 1:21-23). As a limited good, honor must be given to the right person. The results of this rejection of God are "shameful desires" (*pathē atimia*) that ruin human relationships (1:28).

Restoration to the place of honor before God comes through what Christ did on the cross. We become participants with Christ's death by recognizing that we have fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:24). God as the ultimate judge (2:1-16) overlooks our shame because Christ took this shame upon himself on the cross. Instead of receiving the shame of being enemies with God and exposed in our sin, we receive God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and acceptance (5:1-11). Grace opens the door to honor and removes the shame (3:27). Boasting in one's ability to keep God's laws (a possible problem in Ephesus and Crete) usurps the honor that is only possible through Christ and ultimately results in shame (Rom 4:2). The one who is reckoned righteous through Christ is the one who receives true honor.³⁰ It is God in Christ who can bestow true honor to the Christian, not society, and Christ alone can take away lasting shame and humiliation due to sin and failure. Because Christ overcame the shame of the cross (Phil 2:8-11), those who follow him will overcome the shame of sin and death (1 Cor 15:22-27, 42-49, 56-57). Accepting the salvation of

²⁸ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 96.

²⁹ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 97.

³⁰ Halvor Moxnes, "Honor, Shame, and the Outside World in Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 71.

Christ brings honor before God, for God is well pleased with his Son (Matt 3:17; 17:5; 1 Pet 2:6), which was verified by raising him from the dead (Acts 2:32, 36; 3:14-15). Christ's resurrection was the great vindication of honor (Eph 1:20-22; Heb 2:9; Rev 4:9, 11; 5:11-12).

The cross-event serves as God's purposeful method for recreating sinners into the honorable image of Christ. New life in Christ does not bring shame but hope implanted within us by the Holy Spirit (5:5). Honor is maintained by growth in the knowledge of the gospel and by faithfully living out the gospel through holy love. Believers are given a new identity "in Christ" by living according to a new paradigm marked by the law of holy love (2 Cor 5:14; Eph 5:2). In Rom 6:19, 22, the opposite of "shame" (*epaischynesthe*) is not "honor" but "holiness" (*hagiasmos*).³¹ Holiness in shame-based cultures can be defined as a new self-image in the likeness of Christ's own loving, self-giving character, empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). This paradigm shift affects the conscience by providing the new criterion of love as the basis for making decisions. Those who were once shamed learn that they are loved by God and wonderfully made in God's image.

This new value system dramatically affects community, about which Paul is concerned in the passages explored earlier. The church is a new movement of God in the world by which God is fulfilling his plan for humanity (Eph 1:3-14). Those who are redeemed by Christ receive the honor of being the children and heirs of God (Rom 8:16-17). Together, we become the household of God, a community defined by relationship with Christ (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15). Those who compromise the gospel or neglect to live by its new paradigm bring dishonor to God and detrimentally impact the effectiveness of God's plan. Such people must be rebuked in love, not only for their own sake but also for the integrity of the witness of the church to this hope.

³¹ Moxnes, "Honor, Shame, and the Outside World," 67.

Conclusion

This study merely touches the surface of the crucial paradigm shift in the early church whereby Paul and other early leaders attempted to define theology and ethics in such a way that the people of that time could appropriate the gospel in their own lives. Paul repeatedly returned to the heart of the gospel and what Jesus Christ did on the cross as the basis for his theology and ethics. As a person of authority, Paul had the ability to bring shame upon those who followed the paradigms of the world. At times he had to use his emissaries and local leaders to accomplish this.

Those in positions of authority and influence in the church today can learn much from Paul and the early church, especially those who minister in shame-based cultures. Shaming can be used as a source of correction when it is done out of love and with the intention of restoration. The church must be a community of love willing to accept, restore, and renew those who repent of their shameful ways. Leaders in dyadistic settings have significant power to pronounce forgiveness upon sinners (John 20:23), which must be exemplified by accepting them back into the fellowship of the church. God in Christ provides the model and power to do this through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be ministers of reconciliation, which is a significant tool for evangelism for those who have been shamed by their cultures, churches, or families. There may be times when leaders must be like Jeremiah and tear down in order to build up again (Jer 1:10). Shame can be a dangerous tool if used to manipulate people. That is why it is vital that correction and restoration be done in the shadow of the cross.