

## Fame, Shame and Social Media: Missional Insights for Youth Ministry

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Glenn Russell  
[glenn@andrews.edu](mailto:glenn@andrews.edu)

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### Abstract:

Social media shapes and saturates youth and adult identities. A stupid status update, a controversial selfie or a ill-conceived tweet may precipitate an avalanche of shaming. A single click can begin to destroy a person's reputation. America is morphing into a 'fame-shame' culture. Reviewing public shaming in history informs our understanding of shaming today. Missiological research in traditional societies and honor-shame studies in scripture provide insights for ministry today. In this paper, our 'fame-shame' culture is examined through the lenses of social media, scripture and missional analysis. A salvific paradigm contextualized for the fame-shame culture is presented as the most effective response to the cyber grip of social media shaming.

As a single woman aged of 22, Monica fell in love with her married boss and they began a mutual sexual relationship. Two years later, in January 1998, the sordid intimate details of the Lewinsky-Clinton affair exploded into a global scandal and national disgrace. This was the "first time traditional news was usurped by the Internet" (Lewinsky, 2015, 292). Lewinsky became the punch line of raunchy locker room jokes, salacious casual conversations and spicy talk show monologues. She was crudely referenced in over 120 rap songs. As the trial proceeded, months of humiliation in the press and the media destroyed all Monica's reputation and privacy. Too ashamed to appear in public, repeatedly threatened with rape and abuse by an endless stream of online stone-throwers, close to suicide, Lewinsky finally hid from the public – for the next 17

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years. On June 26, 2015, during her speech entitled “Shame Sells”, Monica shared her story of shaming. “Not a day goes by that I’m not reminded of my mistake, and I regret that mistake deeply...overnight I went from being a completely private figure to a publicly humiliated one, worldwide, losing a personal reputation on a global scale almost instantaneously” (p. 292-293). Though these events took place before the rise of social media, internet shaming and the culture of cyber humiliation had begun. The anonymity of the internet provides multiple platforms for exposing of “people’s private words, conversations, actions or even pictures and then making them public – public without consent, public without context and public without compassion” (p. 293).

After Lewinsky’s TED Talk, *The Price of Shame*, the online vitriol and hatred surged again till Nadia Goodman, the social media editor at TED, tearfully described Monica’s life as “having the entire world insult you to your face – for 17 years straight... online media has turned public humiliation into a blood sport” (Goodman, 2015). In his article “The Price of Public Shaming In the Internet Age”, Todd Leopold writes, “To err is human, to forgive divine. Right? Not in the age of social media” (Leopold, 2015). He cites the example of Adam Mark Smith whose rude behavior to a fast food employee was captured on a cellphone camera and posted on YouTube. The video caused such an uproar Mark was fired from his job and his children were so harassed that he had to sell his house and move out of town. Even though he admitted his mistake and publicly apologized for being offensive, he felt tremendous shame and admitted that he would probably have to pay for his outrageous behavior for the rest of his life.

Social media shaming can quickly destroy a person’s reputation, career, family and even the will to live. Trolls, individuals who stalk the internet looking for potential victims to harass

and vilify, are especially cruel. “They (trolls) are turning the web into a cesspool of aggression and violence” (Stein, 2015). A Time magazine poll found that 80% of its writers avoided certain topics out of fear of the potential online response and “nearly half of the women on staff had considered quitting journalism because of the hatred they’ve face online” (Stein). Factors such as anonymity, invisibility, lack of a monitoring authority, and lack of face to face communication are eroding communication norms that have guided and guarded discourse for centuries. Social media has brilliant benefits but there are monsters who hid in the darkness and their vicious, personal attacks seem to set the despicable standard for online shaming. Recently social commentator Jessica Valenti announced she was abandoning social media completely after someone anonymously sent her a rape threat – against her 5-year old daughter (Stein).

In the article “How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco’s Life,” Jon Ronson (2015) provides a vivid example of how social shaming can destroy a life. In 2013 Justine Sacco, a 30 year old director of communications, was on a holiday trip to South Africa. After tweeting several other comments to her 170 followers, she tweeted sarcastically, “Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white!” She pressed send, boarded the plane and slept for most of the 11-hour flight. But when she arrived in Cape Town and turned on her phone, an explosion of texts, messages and status alerts proclaimed that she was #1 worldwide trend on Twitter. The horror show had begun. Though outrageous and racist, her bigoted comment elicited incredibly inappropriate responses as she was harassed at the airport, mocked at the gym, vilified online, refused service at her hotels, and she was informed that “no one could guarantee her safety” (Ronson). Sacco’s story, and many others like it, led Ronson to write his book, “So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed” detailing the personal and cultural price of cyber shame.

Social Media usage:

Social media usage is the primary factor in contemporary shaming. “92% of teens report going online daily – including 24% who say they go online “almost constantly” (Lenhart, 2015, p. 2). Statistics regarding youth who are “almost-constantly online’ reveal ethnic and racial dimensions. African-American teens are most likely to have a smart phone and 34% of African-American teens are online almost constantly. 32% of Hispanic teens report almost constant social media use; 19% of white teens report continual online usage. 90% of teens regularly text and “a typical teen sends and receives 30 texts a day” (p. 4 ). Teenagers and young adults in the United States spend almost 200 minutes per day on a mobile device accessing social media (Statista, 2016). Facebook (71% of teens use it) dominates the social media networks but teens and adults are increasingly using multiple social media sites such as Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter. Girls spend more time on visually-oriented social media (Instagram and Snapchat) and male teen social media usage is rapidly increasing but boys are more likely to play video games (Lenhart, p. 5).

The Return of Shame:

In his insightful Christianity Today article, *The Return of Shame* (Crouch, 2015), Andy Crouch observes that omnipresent social media today is forging a new shame culture. Crouch refers back to Ruth Benedict’s seminal studies which identified Japanese culture as an honor-shame culture in contrast to the Western innocence-guilt cultures. Innocence-guilt cultures are structured around personal internalization of moral law which causes guilt when the individual does something wrong thus violating internalized moral values. Honor-shame cultures are centered in a collective identity which covers individuals with shame when their words or actions

fail to meet the expectations of the group. Guilt declares “I have done something bad”; shame denounces “I am bad.” Guilt may often be a private experience but shame always includes public exposure. Unlike traditional honor-shame cultures, the contemporary social media milieu is a post-modern cyber culture with fame defined by the number of digital likes, retweets, texts, status updates and online comments. “In the new shame culture, the opposite of shame is celebrity – to be attention-grabbing and aggressively unique on some social media platform” (Brooks, 2016). In the fame-shame culture you know if you are good or bad almost immediately as the online responses reveal whether you are honored (famed) or excluded (shamed). Morality is less about right and wrong and more about inclusion and exclusion. Members of one’s social media group (often mistakenly identified as “friends”) often lavish praise in hopes that they will receive as many likes in return or quickly react with ridicule those who don’t fit in or who have violated group standards or points of view.

Social media is fueling a culture where we all want to be liked (Beaty, 2015) which feeds our human need for approval and esteem from others. But it also fuels deep inner fears of rejection. The more time spent on social media, the more we crave instant status, respect and recognition online. The immediacy of online responses perpetuates a system of inclusion or exclusion by one’s peers. “The modern shame culture allegedly values inclusion and tolerance, but it can be strangely unmerciful to those who disagree and to those who don’t fit in” (Brooks). Because an individual’s worth gets attached to page views and likes, postings are intentionally self-filtered to project images of our ideal rather than real lives (Georges, 2015), all done in order to shape how other’s perceive us. Through the subtle process of creating artificial identities online, teens and young adults are especially vulnerable to identity distortion and confusion.

The impact of online shaming can be devastating and exceedingly disproportional to the actual offense. In 2011, Kerry Ann Strasser, a 44-year-old Australian mother of two, was so drunk at a rugby game that she pulled down her pants and urinated on her seat in the stadium (Hess, 2014, p. 101). Someone behind her captured her gross act on his camera phone and posted it on YouTube. It went viral within hours and was picked up by both social media and the traditional news media. IN a few hours, more than 30,000 views on YouTube contributed to Strasser's public humiliation and worldwide shaming. She is not a celebrity seeking fame but rather an ordinary person whose very revolting momentary decision has led to years of rejection, harassment and depression. The intersection of the omnipresent camera-phone and the continual access to social media platforms creates a perfect storm of "iSurveillance" where ordinary people can be both the active creators and the vulnerable victims of media shaming (p. 105). Public exposure, which has long been a component of traditional media, is now the primary domain of social media.

One counter-productive development is the escalation of parents who using public shaming as a punishment for their children's misbehavior. Videos abound showing angry parents ranting at their humiliated child or shamed teens forced to appear in public wearing signs that announce their disobedience or rebellion. For centuries frustrated or desperate parents have abused their children by beating them, but now "the lens replaces the lash" (Schrobsdorff, 2015). But discipline which employs social media shaming is counter-productive and creates far more problems than it solves. The damage done to reputations and relationship may last for years in the perpetual online world.

Public Shaming In Our Past and Present:

Public shaming has deep roots in western societies and in American history (Ronson) (Hess) and was a popular way to expose and punish individuals who often had committed crimes, even some relatively minor violations. From the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, various devices were used in punishment by public spectacle. (Hess p. 103) The public stocks at the gates of town provided the opportunity for ordinary citizens to verbally insult the criminals. Offenders were also often assaulted with rubbish and stones were thrown at them. These public attacks sometimes even killed the humiliated prisoner. Suspected witches were stripped naked and body-searched for the “devil’s mark.” Gossips might be punished with a metal muzzle and drunks were forced to wear signs with the letter “D” proclaiming their offense. Scarlet letters were pinned to the clothes of women who bore illegitimate children. It was widely assumed that the public shaming of sin would serve as a deterrent for others. The pillory (a wooden frame with locks for the prisoners’ wrists and neck) was a common, dreaded tool of public punishment and was often strategically placed near busy markets to provide maximum opportunity for mockery and shaming.

Colonial era shaming began to decline during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as various judges, preachers and humanitarian writers spoke out against punishment by stocks, the whipping post and the pillory (Ronson). During the Enlightenment intellectuals pushed for penal reform so that criminals who had served their time could return to society and become productive citizens again. Americans gradually began to recognize that public shaming almost always disgraced the criminal and thus destroyed any hope of reform or re-integration into society. There is little evidence that public shaming is a deterrent to crime; instead it is usually counter-productive.

But though shaming as a judicial punishment declined, the news media, instead of the courts, picked up the role of cultural watchdog and enforcer. Local newspapers regularly published lists of drunk, thieves and other local criminals. The traditional press branded individual lawbreakers as dangerous, deviant, abnormal or antisocial, depending on the offense and the tenor of the times. Though journalism served a generally healthy role by uncovering injustice and increasing accountability, too often media surveillance and exposure was destructive and punitive. Wrong-doers were exhibited in public stocks of the nightly news or the daily headlines.

Digital capabilities have brought new dimensions of destruction into individual's lives. In centuries past, a criminal might suffer for days or months in public humiliation. But the archiving capacity of the internet allows perpetual shaming for years to come. Hess summarizes this new dynamic of "iShaming":

"Historically, the practice of shaming for minor crimes was confined to a particular geographic area or social circle and administered within a specific time frame. However, in the digital landscape, the media's power to shame is unconstrained because it transcends geographical and temporal boundaries" (Hess, p. 108)

Media shame has no limit for its content is always available, at any time, from any place. Known as "doxing", the public exposing of personal details means that no one's private life is off limits. Anyone and everyone can cast their stones at the dehumanized online target, without remorse or mercy. Social media now has the ability to "impose a digital mark of shame" which is almost impossible to remove (Hess, p. 108).



### Selfies and self-worth

Social media users are too often preoccupied with online posing and body objectification. This is especially evident among female teens because, more than ever, image is still everything. As noted above, female teens gravitate to the visual platforms for social media such as Instagram and Snapchat. It is estimated that 1/3 of all photographs taken by people ages 18-24 are selfies (Stone, 2014). 76% of teen girls are plagued with negative thoughts about themselves and their appearance (Dahl, 2014). In spite of the fact that teen girls post the most selfies on line, 55% of them report feeling “selfie-conscious.” Women and men worry more about money and their own appearance than about health, family and relationships, and professional success. 80% of teen girls compare themselves to celebrities leaving most of them dissatisfied with their own appearance. This comparison anxiety is amplified by their increasing concern over how they look compared to their peers. Peer pressure, interpersonal conflict and the struggle to fit moves beyond the schoolyard to the 24/7 online world of social media. No wonder there is so much punking, pranking and “drama” online as interpersonal conflicts morph on cellphone screen before the perpetually active audience (Marwick, 2014, p. 1191).

Sadly, pressure for peer approval of one’s appearance online magnifies the identity struggle for teens. The self-promotional characteristic of selfies is pervasive for these pictures are the most attractive one possible. Teens often utilize photo enhancement apps to further construct their online visual profile. “We play photographer, model and editor, asking ourselves again and again if we look ok, before inviting feedback from our networks” (Stone). The refrain of the 2012 novelty song “Selfie” by the Cookies put it succinctly: “I’m bored, so Imma take a selfie. I’m obsessed! Its unhealthy!” Selfies portray the ideal and hide the real as insecurities and struggles

are hidden from one's public persona. No wonder teen girls spend twice as much time (7.7 hours) as boys (4 hours) per week on their appearance (Dahl). Appearance is only one dimension of self, but on social media it is a most powerful influence on identity. Social networking sites promote three aspects of body objectification: "internalization of culturally dominant ideals of attractiveness, body surveillance and valuations of self based on appearance" (Manago, 2015, p. 2). For many teens, seductive, provocative or even explicit sexualized photos are a sure-fire way to gain status and attention, especially if someone responds that they are "hot".

Yet the more time young people are engaged in Facebook and other social media, the more they are likely they are to feel body shame (p.10). Through social media obsession with appearance, young men increasingly self-evaluate their bodies as inadequate and young women consider themselves undesirable. David R. Smith, a youth ministry veteran, suggests three strategies for parents of teens: 1) set guidelines on what can be posted and shared and these rules should reflect your family's values, 2) take the time to help teens understand that a healthy self-image is shaped by who they listen to in terms of identity, image and value, 3) show that you value your teens and others on the basis of character and each person's worth in God's eyes (Smith, 2014). These suggestions help teens value themselves and their peers through God's eyes rather than through the distorted lens of social media.

### Social Media and Well-Being

Though minimal or moderate social media use has some benefits, the more college-aged adults used social media, including Facebook, the worse they felt (Kross, 2013, p. 4). Facebook use predicted declines in affective and cognitive well-being. Facebook makes us sadder. Human

beings need connections and interactions with others and social media offers great promise of inter-connectedness. But the reality betrays the promise. Increases in face-to-face interactions increase a person's sense of well-being; increased Facebook interactions lead to a decline in both happiness and satisfaction. "The prescription for Facebook despair is less Facebook... direct interactions with other human beings lead people to feel better" (Hu, 2013). Quality of life is enhanced when time is spent with those we care about in reality and less time is spent in not virtual social reality.

#### Insights from shame and honor research

Though our contemporary fame-shame culture is a unique development, there is much to be gained from research into the traditional honor-shame worldview. Over the last few decades significant contributions regarding honor and shame have been made by Julian Pitt-Rivers, John Peristiany, Bruce Malina, and many other scholars. "Notions about honor and shame exist in virtually all cultures" (Moxnes 1993, p. 19) and honor-shame subcultures such as the military, gangs, high school cliques and immigrant communities have existed in America for years. While innocence-guilt cultures are often highly individualistic, honor-shame cultures have a strong sense of community. One's identity and value are directly connected with one's group, usually one's family and socio-economic community. Honor is the way a person sees themselves based upon how others value them (Rabichev, 1996). The individual has a responsibility to protect the honor of the group rather than pursue his or her own desires.

Innocence-guilt societies instill internal moral values which bring a conviction of sin and guilt when violated. Restoration is found through repentance and forgiveness. In honor-shame

cultures, morality is embedded in one's perception of group values and norms. In traditional honor-shame cultures males are expected to protect the honor of all other family members and females are expected to avoid shameful behavior that could endanger the standing of the entire family in the eyes of the community. Guilt is an internal sense of moral failure. Shame is comprehensive personal humiliation and loss of social position and value (Tennent, 2007, p. 79).

There are three dominant cultural constructs that reflect dominant global world-views: innocence-guilt, honor-shame, power-fear. Innocence-guilt cultures establish a person's status on the basis of their obedience to the law and societal justice. In an honor-shame culture, a person's status depends on the level of guilt or shame in the eyes of the community. In power-fear cultures, one's status is determined by their ability to gain power over supernatural forces, thereby reducing the fear and the consequences of the wrath of the spirits. All cultures contain components of all three of these constructs but each culture is identified by its predominant view.

The biblical narrative of the fall (Genesis 3) deals with all three perspectives. When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately felt shame and experienced guilt, causing them to attempt to hide from God (Tennent, p. 83). The salvation history narrative of scripture reveals God's persistent interventions to deal with human guilt, shame and sin. Western theology has been dominated by the innocence-guilt paradigm. But scripture is more global as can be seen by an analysis of key vocabulary. Various terms for guilt occur 155 times in the scriptures whereas terms for shame occur around 345 times (p. 92). Christian theology, usually formulated by scholars in the West, has, until recently, had a blind spot regarding honor and shame in the scriptures.

Ascribed honor (one's worth from birth based on heritage, wealth and power) is a person's basic starting honor level. Acquired honor (worth based on noble deeds or popularity) can be accumulated or lost throughout life (Crook 2009, p. 598). Honor is always a social value, the community's appraisal of a person's status. In an honor-shame culture, each day and each social encounter can be the venue for gaining or losing one's social capital. The term "riposte" is used in honor-shame research to describe the daily public encounters where a person could gain or lose their honor. These public challenges had for key phases: 1) claim to honor, 2) an attack challenging that claim, 3) riposte or counter-attack, 4) the public verdict (Hellerman, 2000, p. 219). Because honor is conceived as a limited good, each contest needed to be judged so the community is the public court of reputation (PCR) which declares the verdict regarding shame and honor (p. 217). One's honor or shame is in the hands of others; public opinion matters supremely. This dimension of shame and honor is evident in our contemporary online fame-shame culture where one's status is dependent upon social media approval. Digital popularity is easily monitored online by hits, clicks, retweets, comments and replies. The narratives of digital pillorying reveal contemporary variations of challenge-riposte as the online community giving the ultimate thumbs up or thumbs down.

In traditional honor-shame societies the individual is expected to uphold community values and norms and is shamed if he or she fails to meet expectations. This provides powerful motivation for moral and ethical behavior because shame and exposure are to be avoided at all costs. "To simplify slightly, maintaining (or defending) honour is primarily a male responsibility, and avoiding shame is primarily a female one" (Wilson, 2014, p.158). Women are the gatekeepers with regard to sexual purity for they must not defile themselves and their family honor. In

traditional societies, the shame of one member of the family spreads to shame the entire household (Moon, 2015, p. 340). This is a major difference between honor-shame societies and our fame-shame culture. In our culture, individualism and postmodern moral relativism have led to a massive decline of the value of purity. Every teenage girl (or boy) know the popularity value of a seductive photo or a suggestive tweet. In contemporary culture, purity is mocked and permissive sexuality is the norm. In this flipped fame-shame worldview, promiscuity is celebrated and modesty is demeaned.

Our fame-shame culture is still highly individualistic rather than collective and community-oriented like traditional honor-shame cultures. Thus our fame-shame culture embraces the paradox that individual freedom is highly valued yet conformity to one's community of peers is still expected. This duality of individuality and community provides the context for fame-shame dynamics. On the other hand, in a more positive dynamic, this duality holds the potential for turning the tide of online public shaming, at least in individual cases. Online shaming is a kind of herd mentality but the piling on can be greatly reduced when individuals who have the courage to be "upstanders" by speaking up and standing up for the victims of shaming. Nadia Goodman documents how this occurred in the predominantly negative Monica Lewinsky comment thread on the TED Facebook page (Goodman). When positive comments were moved to the top of the thread and anti-Monica comments were deleted, the tide began to turn. Positive voices began to decrease the volume of the haters as an affirming atmosphere set a new informal standard of what was acceptable. Youth need to realize that one solution to online shaming is positive peer-influence. Their positive remark in social media can

empower others to also be “upstanders” and together they may be able to turn back a negative, unjust online attack.

Shame and Soteriology:

The greatest weapon against our shame-fame culture is a soteriology that articulates a new transformational contextual understanding of salvation. Only a clear understanding of human dignity in light of creation and the cross can break the grip of self-evaluation through social media.

The incarnation of Jesus “sets God’s great reversal into motion” (Tennent, p. 88). Jesus proclaims a new vertical definition of honor and shame and rejects the destructive traditional horizontal model. In his life and ministry Jesus repeatedly refused to conform to the expectations of Jews or Gentiles with regard to honor. Honor was understood to be the value that a person receives from a group or community (Malina, 2001), thus there was a constant struggle in society as people scrambled for recognition and glory. The Gospels contain numerous narratives where Jesus is publicly challenged by those who would reduce his status.

John 8:31-39 is an example of such an attack against Jesus. Some Jewish leaders claim ascribed honor (“We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been enslaved” (8:33 & 39). Jesus counters with the riposte that their works show that they are sons of their father the Devil (8:44). They counter-attack by implying Jesus was born out of fornication (a status of shame). Next they pejoratively label him “a Samaritan” who has a demon (8:48). Jesus rejects their judgment, declaring that “My Father glorifies me” (8:54). Such a claim to vertical honor is so offensive to them that they seek to stone him, a form of execution by community shaming.

Jesus refused to pander to the popularity of the crowds, refused to compromise to gain the support of the religious elite, and refused to validate their court of public recognition. Instead of clamoring for higher status, he serves with a basin and a towel. Instead of fraternizing with the powerful, he mingles with the outcasts and the weak. Luke 20:19-26 records another occasion when the religious spies tried to trap Jesus regarding taxes. “And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they become silent” Luke 20:26. “The PCR rules: the spies cannot persuade it to distribute shame to Jesus because Jesus keeps outwitting them, and they in turn are shamed” (Crook, p. 602). The enemies of Jesus are enraged because their honor is diminishing rapidly in the eyes of the fickle crowd and their attempts to shame Jesus fail because he has redefined shame and honor (Watson, 2005, 6). The court of heaven replaces the court of human opinion. . On the other hand, “Satan and those who follow his ways face the ultimate shame of isolation from God and God’s purposes (Ackerman, 2013, p. 89).

In ancient honor-shame societies, individuals needed to be clearly identified within their group: their family, social status, their leaders, their occupation and their religion. The identified group because the court of public reputation and the opinions of outsider groups mattered little. The group’s definition of honor and shame ensured respect and proper behavior for all in the group would seek to be and do what the group values (Paddock, 2013, p. 90). This insight has tremendous potential for youth ministry within our fame-shame culture as youth discover the gospel provides a new identity and a new community.

True honor comes from God; the greatest shame comes turning away from Him. Rather than an oppressive horizontal paradigm of fame and honor, Jesus proclaimed a divine, vertical



verdict for every believer. God, not one's society, peers or group, is the ultimate court of public recognition. His judgment is supreme for He alone knows every heart and mind. In Jewish and Roman societies, ridicule and invective was used to mock the appearance or clothing of those who did not meet social standards (Neufeld, 2014, p. 3). Dress and ornamentation were ways to communicate status and wealth. In this context Jesus endured incredible indignity on the cross as he was stripped, mocked, and hung naked for the entire community to see his marks of shame. He was crucified between two cursing, condemned thieves. Every possible method of public shaming was used against Jesus. Yet through the transforming majesty of divine grace and mercy, the horizontal paradigm of honor and shame is shattered. The cross absorbs the shame, guilt and fear of broken humanity. God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise (1 Cor 1:27). Christianity joyfully proclaims that the sinner's shame is replaced by the sacrificial honor of our sinless Savior. All false claims to honor are superseded by the God's honor through his Son (Borges, 2013, p. 83).

Not only does Jesus redefine honor and shame, He also redefines community. Through the miracle of inclusive grace, believers lose their old shameful status as "in sin" and are given a new identity "in Christ." They are incorporated into a new community, the body of Christ. The gospel invites people to join the global redeemed family. "Conversion means changing one's group identity" (Wu, 2015, p. 10). Shame is a pollutant that has defiled, isolated and excluded the sinner. Grace is the catalyst that cleanses, restores and re-integrates the redeemed into the family of God. Through this covenantal relationship, God creates his own family of honored members from all nations (Borges, p. 85). At the cross, God declares "I have taken your shame. My verdict is all that matters." For the believer, the horizontal court of public opinion and the oppressive

pressure to seek popularity and approval are replaced by the vertical verdict of divine forgiveness and cleansing. Faith is exclusively trusting Jesus as the new source of one's honor and identity

But there is more! God does not merely forgive and restore. He honors! Instead of filthy rags, the redeemed are given royal robes of righteousness and crowns of glory. Instead of being shamed at Christ's soon return, they will be exalted and honored to reign with Him on high. God restores the dominion for which they were created as they share His glory. In the ultimate cosmic victory parade, the followers of Christ become "the fragrance of victory", honored before God and the universe (2 Cor 2:15). This magnificent exaltation is only promised to those who have cast aside the fame-shame paradigms of this world. Human pride and egotism cannot exist in the presence of such holy God-centered honor.

Youth today who are trapped in the digital grasp of our contemporary fame-shame culture need the Good News that the vertical paradigm of grace can free each person from the tyranny of fear, guilt and shame. Teens and young adults whose identity is so intertwined with the feedback they receive on social media need to discover that God's verdict on their behalf is far more transformative and beneficial than the temporary approval of online peers. Grace remaps the zone of what counts as honorable and shameful (Ackerman, p. 87). The cross, the resurrection and the soon return of Jesus eradicate guilt, fear and shame of sin. The Divine Father removes the rags of shame upon His prodigal sons and daughters, wraps them in honor with his best robes – and takes them into the party! God's awesome grace inspires the triumphant proclamation of all the Redeemed: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16)."

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**About the Author:**

Glenn Russell is Associate Professor of Practics and Mission in the Department of Religion and Biblical Languages at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, MI). The son of missionary parents, he been has served as a pastor and educator and has been a guest speaker in more than 14 countries. Over the last 27 years he taken thousands of youth on short-term mission teams to Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central America, North America, Asia and the South Pacific. He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Association of Youth Ministry Educators. His wife Sharon is also and educator and they have two adult children and one grandchild. His email is [glenn@andrews.edu](mailto:glenn@andrews.edu)

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