HONOR, SHAME, AND THE GOSPEL

Reframing Our Message and Ministry

FOREWORD BY VELI-MATTI KÄRKKÄINEN

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CHAPTER 1

THE HONOR AND GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST: Heart of the Gospel and the Mission of God

STEVEN C. HAWTHORNE

To understand honor-shame dynamics amid the inter-cultural complexities of mission, one must consider the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. And here's why: Behind, beneath, and above all human shames and honors is the singular glory of Jesus. In this chapter, we will affirm the glory that Jesus is worthy to receive. But we will also consider the "praise and glory and honor" (1 Pet 1:7)[1] that the living God bestows upon people in Christ.

Following some introductory remarks, we will explore what I call "true glory," the glory that God gives to people in and with Christ. Then we will identify a few highlights of the great biblical narrative of God's glory. Finally, we'll look at three occasions when God spoke from heaven in the Gospels, each of them increasing our understanding of how we are called to share in the suffering and joy of Christ's glory.

Why Glory Matters

To consider the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, it's helpful to recognize, by contrast, how honor and glory usually work among humans in the flow and go of cultures.

Creatures and Cultures of Glory

Two things seem to be at work in honor-shame dynamics within every culture. First, honor and shame are known and practiced in every culture. Although practices are endlessly varied, every society functions with customary ways of offering respect and recognition, as well as opprobrium

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and disgrace. In some cultures, honor and shame dominate most interactions, so that we can refer to them as honor-shame cultures. But in reality honor-shame dynamics are a human universal.

Second, every culture, including every honor-shame system, is broken by sin. It's not too much to say that every honor-shame system is somehow defective and damage-dealing. Paul claims that not a few but "many walk" so that their "glory is in their shame" (Phil 3:17–19). The very things that should be disdained and rejected are instead exalted. This inversion, this flip, to exalt what is detestable is so endemic to humanity that we are not wrong to trace it back to the Fall.

In Romans 1, Paul pinpoints just how we became such reckless shame shifters. When humanity ceased to honor God in accord with what they clearly knew, "their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom 1:19–22). They made a horrific exchange. They—let's identify with this in the first person and say *we*—we traded "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible" humanity and animals (1:23). Why this trade? What motivates the human heart to make this exchange?

We desire glory. Actually, God made us that way—as creatures of glory. Three features mark humans as creatures of glory: We perceive glory, we celebrate glory together, and we desire glory. People, as well as angels, perceive glory.[2] Not only do humans recognize splendor, excellence, and beauty,[3] but we also instinctively know that we must point out that beauty to others. Anything truly worthy is also praiseworthy. That is, we don't just behold what is beautiful or exceptional. We call for the attention of others to see and celebrate it together. There is something deeply satisfying about celebrating, with others, someone or something of worth. Perhaps the only thing we find even more satisfying is to be the object of praise and celebration. We are formed with an intrinsic yearning, an essential desiring, to be named, to be recognized, to be loved.

This yearning for glory is the hunger that drives us, in the heart-darkened foolishness seen in Romans 1, to keep making the exchange that Paul describes, so that we glory in the very things that are, in reality, our shame. Our self-created objects of adoration, our precious idols, are nothing more than an assemblage of exaggerated human abilities—glamorized ideals of what we see in ourselves. Idolatry is usually denounced as wrong because false gods are not real. But because idols are grotesque exaggerations of creaturely powers, in reality, the heart of our folly is the absurdity of self-given honor.

I mention the universality of broken honor systems because our goal in this broad conversation about honor-shame is not merely to learn tips for using honor-talk in some face-saving cultures. We want to explore how to better follow our Lord in fulfilling the mission of God. The heart of that mission is the glory and honor of Jesus. In his glory is the only hope of glory for the nations.

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Our Greater Creator and the Conflict of Cultures

The world seems to be shrinking, with growing technologies, globalized interactions, and ever-shifting social-group identities. In this crush and clash of cultures we hope to resolve the chaos by embracing egalitarian ideals. We like the equanimity of the fictional community of Lake Wobegon, where "all the children are above average." But in reality, present-day postmodern societies are often confused by brash demands for dignity, outlandish virtue signals, and shame campaigns.

Ironically, the rules of multiculturalism call for a rigorous equalizing of all cultures, races, and genders. Ideas of beauty, excellence, or prestige, along with any kind of all-encompassing metanarrative—supposedly all of these are mere social constructs that are inherently oppressive. The earth must be flattened into a morass of coexistent sameness.

I describe this postmodern, post-truth environment in order to highlight a huge operative presumption behind all the phony equivocation about equalization: There is no one greater to bestow honor. Without a creator God, there is no greater God—someone who can regard and recognize people, or who can prize and praise their cultural endeavors. Without someone higher and greater who transcends all cultures, then honor and shame are indeed mere social constructs. The only remaining hope, then, is to find or fabricate ways to gain or sustain fleeting moments of respect.

But there is someone greater! The God of glory. In his sight we are not merely equal. We are much more than merely equal. In his sight we are precious. The living God values and treasures people.

Many of us have known this since childhood days. In Sunday school we sang:

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

The key words are "in his sight." We are not objects of pity. Since God gazes upon us as his beloved, we are precious.

We are known and named by our greater Creator. We are truly honored by his love. This God-given honor-in-love is what I will call "true glory."

Loving Glory: From People or from God

By the words "true glory," I am speaking of the honor, acclaim, and praise that come from God himself to people. I am not referring to the marvel of God's "intrinsic glory," a term we use to speak of the eternal, inherent worth and splendor of the uncreated, triune God.

Biblical authors often use the same words (Hebrew *kavod*, Greek *doxa*) to refer both to the glory of which God is utterly worthy as well as to the honor and

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praise that God gives to people. *Glory* is not a word that is reserved for God alone. *Glory*, as used by biblical authors, can also refer to the beauty, the brightness, the weight, and the worth of created things or persons.

Having celebrated in 2017 the anniversary of the Protestant Reformation,[4] understand that I'm not trying to undermine the fifth "sola," *Soli Deo gloria*: "glory to God alone." That slogan was designed primarily to controvert the practice of crass veneration of saints and angels. Paul mentions more than once God's "riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).[5] God does not demean himself by condescending to bestow honor upon his people. His infinite glory can never be diminished in the slightest.

Jesus called people to abandon the habit of receiving "glory (*doxa*) from one another" and instead to "seek the glory (*doxa*) that is from the one and only God" (John 5:44). Later John notes that "many even of the rulers" believed in Jesus, but they were not openly "confessing Him" (12:42). Why do we so often see more believers than followers? John offers a penetrating insight as to why. The leaders were fearful of being ousted from their society. They remained crypto-believers "for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue" (12:42). John gets to the heart of the matter. This fear was based on a love: "for they loved the approval [or glory] (*doxa*) of men rather than the approval [or glory] (*doxa*) of God" (12:43).

John contrasts two different kinds of glory. First, there is "the glory of men": the applause, the status, the fame, that humans seek to gain and retain from other people. Second is what I call "true glory"—that is, the praise or honor that people can hope to receive from God himself. Only the living God can give this honor. He has made us to yearn to be named, celebrated, and prized. And he delights in giving such glory.

As we examine the honor-and-shame dynamics in various societies, we must first consider the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. Here's why—the best honors bestowed in any culture can only lightly satisfy our yearning for glory. Jesus himself calls us to "seek the glory that is from the one and only God" (John 5:44). The "one and only God" reveals his glory in "the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). We only experience this authentic glory as we know, and are known by, the person of Jesus—the crucified Lamb, the risen One, the exalted Son of Man.

True Glory from God with Christ

We will approach the glory of Christ by exploring the great facts of the gospel. The power of the gospel is that *in* one man, *by* God's doing, there is the creation of a new humanity. This new humanity shares in the death, the life, and the glory of the singular Son of God. There is glory for humankind only *in* and *with* the crucified, risen, and exalted One. Let's consider four aspects of how people are joined with Christ.

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True Glory with Christ in His Death and Resurrection

The gospel is not some self-esteem bromide, urging us to try to be a little bit more like Jesus. The gospel declares that we can be joined *with* Jesus, somehow letting his death become our death so that his life can be our life. The familiar lines of Romans make it clear that all "who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death" (Rom 6:3). Paul says that "Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father" so that those joined in his death "might walk in newness of life." Paul's logic is simple: "If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (6:3–5). To be "in Christ" is to be joined with Jesus in his life and in his death.

True Glory with the Exalted Christ, Revealed at His Coming

We rightly hold the death and rising of our Lord as central. But as our creeds and liturgies declare, Christ was not merely raised from the dead. He was lifted from the earth into the sky while his followers watched (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9–11). They became convinced by the Scriptures that Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God. On Pentecost they declared his death and his resurrection (Acts 2:23–32). But the high point of Peter's message was not that Jesus was somehow alive, but that Jesus had "been exalted to the right hand of God" (2:33). Peter's outrageous claim of what was unseen in the heavens was demonstrably true because Jesus had "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit." And that was evident to all because, as Peter said, "He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (2:33), referring to the many people prophesying in languages from "every nation under heaven" (2:5).

Christ had been enthroned at God's right hand. But his glory was not seen. Jesus had been inaugurated as King, but his kingdom was hidden. Followers were urged to focus their hope on his coming, when the glory of the Messiah-King would be revealed.

Writing to the Colossians, Paul announced that they could live very differently because they had "died with Christ" (Col 2:20). Paul had also urged them to realize that they had been "raised up" with Christ (Col 2:12). We could easily hear those words as referring to the resurrection. But he actually used the words "raised up" to refer to the exaltation of Christ: "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). Why should ordinary people seek such otherworldly matters? Because, although the risen Lord may be hidden now, he *is* coming. And he is coming with glory: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (3:4).

In his letters, Peter taught something similar about Christ's exaltation. Peter claimed that because of the resurrection of Jesus, Christians have already been given an unfading but unseen inheritance "reserved in heaven" until it is "revealed in the

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