[God] adorned [his children] with so many honors
as to render their condition not far inferior
to divine and celestial glory.

John Calvin

Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. . . .
So the honor is for you who believe. . . .
But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

1 Peter 2:6-7, 9 esv

Jayson met Farhad, a young Central Asian man, at a local language institute. One day after class we were standing outside having a conversation about God. There was an open door to share the gospel, so I said something like, “Your sins make you guilty before God, but Jesus died so your sins could be forgiven and you could escape punishment.” While speaking, I could tell something was not right. Farhad’s eyebrows bunched up with a look of sincere confusion, as if I were speaking an entirely different language.

Like most people in Central Asia, Farhad hardly sensed personal guilt for doing something wrong, so he was not seeking forgiveness in his life. This
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explanation of the gospel did not resonate at the personal, emotional level. Couching the work of Christ in a legal framework (i.e., guilt, punishment, forgiveness) was difficult for Farhad to comprehend. The courts in Central Asia are notoriously corrupt—verdicts depend much more on who people know than what actually happened. So the imagery of a courtroom to explain how God saves sounded strange to him.

This common evangelistic approach confuses the hearer and frustrates the evangelist. Many Christians, however, know of no other option than to continue repeating the guilt-oriented explanation of the gospel. Assuming a strictly legal framework for the gospel functionally requires non-Western peoples to understand the gospel in the foreign language of guilt-innocence terms. So consequently, people in honor-shame cultures must adopt a guilt-innocence outlook to properly understand “the gospel.” However, we believe the gospel can be explained and experienced within an honor-shame framework.

People very well may benefit from an articulation of the gospel in terms of guilt and innocence, but for many people, that does not reach to the deepest lostness and alienation they experience. For example, I (Mark) regularly share the gospel in terms of guilt with men in the county jail. If forgiveness, however, was the only element of the gospel they experienced, they would still carry a burden of shame. As Job said, “Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame” (Job 10:15 niv). Or a Muslim cleric trained in Islamic theology might likely understand religious salvation in terms of deeds and merits yet be heavily influenced by the reality of shame in his community. Proclaiming biblical salvation in honor-shame terms is not over or against other gospel explanations but contributes to a fuller explanation of God’s multifaceted saving work. To articulate the gospel in guilt-innocence terms is true, and often appropriate, but it is not the only facet of God’s salvation.

Recently Mark’s Japanese friend recounted how he became a Christian.¹ He was a university student following the path he desired and the one expected of him. Yet his life lacked meaning and purpose. He had never gone to a church, but visited one hoping to find more meaning for his life. The warmth and acceptance he felt there drew him back. He continued to attend. Although the pastor explained to him the plan of salvation, how to
become a Christian, it was hard to comprehend. The concept of sin’s guilt was foreign to him. The pastor, however, kept explaining it to him. Finally after a few months of repeated explanations he grasped enough to understand that Jesus died to forgive his sins. After listening to his story I asked my friend, “Wouldn’t it have been helpful if the pastor would have described salvation to you in a way that connected with concepts and experiences you would have readily understood, such as shame and honor?” He responded, “That would have been wonderful.” Rather than trying to teach Japanese how to understand the cross and salvation using foreign concepts of guilt and justice, how might things have changed if the pastor instead talked about sin and the cross in terms of shame?

This story illustrates our approach to evangelism—though God’s Spirit is the ultimate agent causing spiritual regeneration in people, how Christians explain salvation does influence the evangelistic process. While acknowledging God’s sovereignty, we explain the human element of evangelism to help Christians best steward the relationships and opportunities God has granted.

Honor-shame is not a “magic key” for evangelism, but it can reduce cultural friction. Even though a person may likely understand sin and salvation better when hearing the gospel in honor-shame terms, that may not automatically produce saving faith. Someone may cognitively understand the gospel yet deny Christ to avoid disgracing their family.

Chapters four and five set forth many theological elements of honor-shame in Scripture. As we apply those truths to evangelism, we purposefully do not offer a one-size-fits-all evangelism technique for all cultures. No single evangelism method can apply to all honor-shame cultures, as every context and every person is unique. We do mention several evangelistic presentations from specific contexts, but more as examples than as patterns. Understanding the biblical, relational and social facets of how God saves will help readers discern and catalyze the process of salvation.

**Building Bridges of Honor**

The first step in the evangelism process is meeting people. In honor-shame cultures it is particularly important to form relational bridges that honor people. As we proclaim a God who removes shame and restores honor, we
must concretely embody that message in our own actions and lives. People will hardly hear from us what they do not see in us. From our initial encounters with people our actions should correspond with our words. Naturally people will be more receptive to hearing about God’s honor if they experience honoring interactions with us. Here is a negative example.

I (Jayson) started a video club to teach English at a local university to meet college students. I decided to watch 24—the Fox television series featuring Agent Jack Bauer. I chose the entertaining show because it features ethical dilemmas worth discussing. After weekly meetings of the video club I would invite the students from club to tea, hoping to pivot the conversation to the person of Jesus. I labored as best as I knew at the time, but in hindsight I realize a significant flaw in my approach to meeting people. The bridges I developed to make relationships implicitly shamed people. In the show 24 the “bad guys” are usually Russians or Muslims. The students attending were Muslims who grew up as part of the Soviet Union. The Hollywood-created plots for 24 accentuated the standard stereotypes—“Muslims are evil terrorists,” and “Russians plot world destruction.” Hosting an English club that propagated these stereotypes was not an honoring way to relationally connect with young adults in Central Asia. It was akin to telling a Polish joke in Poland.

The means of our ministry (i.e., relational structures and bridges) must cohere with our ends (i.e., spiritual objective of making disciples). Martin Luther King Jr.’s words regarding the relationship between means and ends (originally in the context of nonviolent resistance) shed light on this aspect of evangelism.

\[\text{Ends are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process, and ultimately you can't reach good ends through separate means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree.} \]

\[\ldots \text{Means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means.}^2 \]

In our evangelism, the means and ends cohere when the end of God’s honor preexists in the ways we share that news. Since people see the gospel as much as they hear the gospel, our relational interactions with nonbelievers are vital aspects of the evangelism process. Two of Jesus’ common relational
bridges were eating with people and miraculous healings—both acts that removed social stigma and embodied the divine honor he taught about. Jesus’ ministry sets an example for how his church continues God’s mission of bringing honor to a world of shame.

What are practical ways Christians working in honor-shame cultures can embody the gospel of God’s honor? As you ask this question, it is important to answer it from the vantage point of the host culture—“What are ways they would sense honor?” All cultures communicate (and receive) honor uniquely.

In the previous chapter we mentioned ways to honor people in personal relationships. Here are some examples of how Jayson’s team reformulated some relational bridges and ministry structures to better account for the honor-shame realities.

I continued to teach English, but adopted an ESL curriculum focusing on trauma recovery to address wounds in our ethnically divided context. Instead of merely entertaining or improving linguistic fluency, it fostered healing from traumatic shame and a conversation about the nature of ethnicity and true community.

I continued to spend time with the university students by inviting them to join me in volunteering at a local orphanage. Our attempts to play games with the children were chaotic, but provided a regular way to engage life on the margins. I don’t want to overplay the impact of those afternoons, but our times developed a sense of mutual honor—the orphaned boys were always eager to be around older guys, and my student-friends overcame the false stigmas they associated with orphans. In a small way, we all experienced a taste of true honor in those courtyard soccer games. Those times helped everyone recalibrate his or her notions of honor to better align with God’s.

In micro-enterprise development, our objective transitioned from simply job creation and business training to “honorification.” We refocused business activities and structures to promote a healthy sense of personal and cultural honor for both employees and customers. Leveraging the natural inclination toward honor in the society improved the business, our relationships and overall impact.

Westerners in foreign countries often encounter the simple question, “What do you do?” In restricted-access countries, answering this question can be very challenging—how could I be honest about my spiritual aim without pegging myself as a proselytizer? I was often unsure of how to
navigate social introductions. As we discerned the centrality of honor and made it a prominent factor in our ministry, I began saying, “God called us to Central Asia to complete people’s honor, socially and spiritually, through various projects.” Naturally, that provoked conversations about our projects and the nature of honor itself. We were intentional to use a verb that implied Central Asians already had dignity. Our objective was not to import honor from the West, but to highlight and uncover the glory they would eventually bring into heaven (Rev 21:26). Central Asians themselves are rather preoccupied about acquiring honor for themselves, their family and their nation, so were pleased to hear about a foreigner (and God) who shared a parallel interest.

When Christians employ honoring channels to engage people, their social identity naturally aligns with their spiritual objective. There is integrity. In honor-shame cultures the channel through which people meet you as a Christian will influence how they interpret the message you share with them. The message cannot be separated from the messenger. So we must purposefully make our relational structures honoring.

Building honoring relational bridges is a vital element of the evangelistic process, but only one element. Verbal proclamation of eternal honor from Jesus Christ is necessary. Working toward a healthy sense of social honor will be incomplete if people do not experience God’s honor that saves people from spiritual shame. Social honor is part of God’s common grace; eternal honor is God’s saving grace.4 In examining the nature of that eternal honor in Christ, we address two questions for honor-shame contexts: What is the gospel? and, How can we best explain the gospel?

**Metaphors of Status Reversal**

What happens when a person is saved? What is the state of a person before, and then after, they come into relationship with God? How does the Bible define salvation? We begin with these questions about salvation since soteriology (i.e., our theology of salvation) shapes evangelism (i.e., our proclamation of salvation). This fact requires us to consider the nature of biblical salvation before discussing evangelistic approaches.

Status reversal and group incorporation are two central aspects of biblical salvation. These two salvation motifs are prevalent throughout the Bible and
relevant for non-Western cultures today. Examining each one moves us toward a biblical model of evangelism for contemporary honor-shame settings. First, we discuss status reversal.

God reverses our status from one of shame to one of honor. Salvation from God overturns previous measures of status. He reverses our identity. The gospel is a message of “salvation-as-reversal, of status transposition, of outsiders becoming insiders, and grace for unexpected people.” All humans are sinners in need of God’s salvation. Salvation reverses the condition of spiritual shame that was brought on by a person’s own sin. Status reversal includes an element of recognizing and turning from shameful behavior—such as Zacchaeus. Salvation also includes status reversal for those sinned against—people shamed and excluded by distorted honor systems, something every human experiences to some degree. Examples in the Gospels would be the lepers or the woman with the flow of blood. God’s status-reversing salvation fully saves us from sin.

Observe how these verses portray salvation as the removal of shame and restoration of honor.

I [God] will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth. . . .
I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord. (Zeph 3:19-20)

Instead of your shame
you will receive a double portion,
and instead of disgrace
you will rejoice in your inheritance. (Is 61:7 niv)

The glory that you have given me I have given them. (Jn 17:22)

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame.”
So the honor is for you who believe. (1 Pet 2:6-7 esv)
Biblical writers also utilize metaphors to explain the reversal of our status through Jesus. Metaphors attribute status and identity by projecting the characteristics from something known to something unknown. Metaphors are more than just communication aids or literary devices; they are powerful tools for shaping social reality and defining identity. Social anthropologists note that peoples’ identities are often based on the metaphors they use. English speakers, for example, use animals as metaphors in communication. Imagine if we were playing a basketball game and I told you, “Watch out for John, he’s a snake!” That intuitively means something entirely different than if I say, “Watch out for John, he’s a beast!” When I mention a certain animal, your brain projects a specific meaning and identify onto John. That is how metaphors work. For this reason, biblical authors use social categories as metaphors to explain the radical transformation taking place in the heavenly realms when someone associates with Jesus Christ. This follows Aristotle’s rhetorical advice: “To adorn borrow metaphor from things superior, to disparage from things inferior.”

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul leverages metaphors in just this way: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). Before Christ we were “strangers” and “aliens”—shameful people outside of the established community. But now we are “citizens” and “members”—honorable people within the group, accepted into the community. The words honor or shame are not present in this passage, but the honor-shame values ooze out of this text through the metaphors.

Because honor and shame are abstract notions, the Bible uses images and realities from regular life to explain how God transposes people from shame to honor. We list twenty-eight metaphors of status reversal. In moving people from shame to honor, God does the following:

- He clothes the naked (Gen 3:21; Is 61:10; Lk 15:22; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Rev 19:8).
- He enriches the poor (1 Sam 2:8; Lk 6:20).
- He cleanses the dirty (Mt 8:2:3; Jn 1:7; Rev 7:14).
- He returns the exiled (Jer 29:10-14; Lk 15:22-24).
- He strengthens the weak (Is 40:29-31; 2 Cor 12:9; 13:4; 1 Pet 5:10).
• He heals the sick (Ex 23:25; Mt 9:27-35; 11:4-6; Rev 21:4).
• He raises the dead (Jn 11:23-44; Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 15:42-43).
• He exalts the humbled (Prov 3:34; Lk 1:52; Phil 2:8-9; Jas 4:10).
• He adopts the orphans (Ezek 16:1-10; Rom 9:25-26; Gal 4:1-6).
• He blesses the cursed (Ps 109:28; Gal 3:13-14).
• He makes wise the foolish (Jas 1:5; 1 Cor 2:6-12).
• He liberates the oppressed (Gen 41; Lk 4:18; Acts 16:25-26).
• He frees the slaves (Ex 6:6; Rom 6:15-23; Gal 4:7-9).
• He enlightens the darkened (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13).
• He accepts the rejected (Mt 9:10; Acts 10:35).
• He befriends the enemy (John 15:14-15; Rom 5:10).
• He draws near to the distant (Is 57:19; Eph 2:17-18).
• He enthrones the powerless (1 Sam 2:8; Eph 2:6; Rev 2:26-27).
• He marries the adulterer (Hos 3; Eph 2:19).
• He finds the lost (Lk 15:4; 19:10).
• He hosts the hungry (Ps 23:5; Lk 15:23; Rev 19:9).
• He raises the lowly (1 Sam 2:8; Mt 20:16).
• He remembers the forgotten (1 Sam 1:11).
• He gives victory to the defeated (Rom 8:37; Rev 12:11).
• He gives life to the barren (Gen 21:1-7; Ps 113:9; Is 54:1-5).
• He gives citizenship to the foreigner (Ruth 1:1-4:22; Eph 2:12, 19; Phil 4:20).
• He gives an inheritance to those without a birthright (Is 61:7; Eph 1:11-18; 1 Pet 1:4).

The honoring replicated in the above images reveals how God saves people from concrete ignominy, but those images serve as a metaphorical depictions of believer’s spiritual transformation. When someone trusts in Christ, this is what happens in the heavenly realms. Biblical authors adeptly used culturally relevant metaphors to communicate our salvation from shame to honor.
Metaphors of status reversal are not simply the content of the gospel we proclaim, but also a biblical pattern to communicate salvation in culturally relevant terms. Metaphors inform hermeneutics and evangelism. Metaphors play a prominent role in biblical theology, so Christians contextualizing the gospel crossculturally must be adroit at utilizing metaphors in evangelism. This is how people can understand the honor they can have in Christ. We will now discuss how to use metaphors as a key evangelistic tool for proclaiming the gospel of status reversal.

**Explaining Status Reversal**

Pragmatically speaking, the theological reality of status reversal must eventually be shaped into a reproducible evangelistic method. What is a concise, simple way you would explain how Christ removes shame and restores honor? The diversity of honor-shame cultures means Christian witness must be contextualized into the language and cultural symbols of your particular cultural setting. Every soil is unique. To aid readers in the process of developing a practical tool for evangelism, we offer this three-phase process. Please note, this process is not a five-minute activity you do individually, but an ongoing dialogue.

1. Analyze culture: Learn the culture’s language and grammar for attributing honor and shame. Here are some questions for mining the honor-shame elements in a culture. What common terms, idioms or euphemisms refer to the concepts of honor and shame? What are the primary symbols and images of honor and shame? When someone is disgraced, how do they try to restore their honor? What cultural rituals and practices confer status (high or low)? What words (e.g., phrases, metaphors, adjectives) communicate respect or disrespect? What verbs are used with the social metaphors of “face” and “name”? What objects are associated with honor and shame? What commonly known stories or characters embody the cultural notions of honor-shame? The answers to these questions become the metaphoric language for explaining biblical salvation—that is, evangelism.

2. Research Scripture: What verses, stories and images in the Bible parallel cultural notions of honor and shame? What aspects of the Bible will easily
resonate and naturally make sense to people? What biblical metaphors of status reversal listed above would be particularly meaningful? (Each metaphor of status reversal is a biblical motif one could easily use to frame the gospel, once you have a good grasp on the biblical metaphor.)

3. Create a tool: Develop a contextually meaningful tool that uses the cultural language and logic of honor-shame (phase one) to explain God's salvation (phase two). Avoid the tendency to distill the good news of status reversal into propositional statements. People of honor-shame cultures tend to be oral and concrete learners, so narrative articulations of the gospel resonate better. Lean toward parables and stories. Think imaginatively; convey believer's transposition from shame to honor visually and concretely using the arts. Experiment and explore, developing a biblical, relevant and concise evangelistic tool will likely be a process of trial and error. Since this is a creative act, collaborate with others to field the best ideas.

We feature three distinct evangelistic examples from honor-shame contexts. Their diversity in both content and form display a promising range of evangelistic approaches. All three approaches are extended metaphors of status reversals; they access cultural imagery to communicate how Christ restores honor. The first example comes from East Asia. Paul Sadler, a missionary-pastor in Japan, shares a metaphorical parable involving the Japanese kotatsu table. The following is excerpted from his Evangelical Missions Quarterly article "A Japanese Gospel Message."

The “kotatsu” is a low table with an electric heat element in the bottom to warm those who sit around it. It is one of the most precious means of fellowship in Japanese society. Life in Japan can often be quite cold emotionally, but the kotatsu is a symbol of warmth, intimacy, and security. These are the values the Japanese long for and to which the Bible speaks to powerfully.

. . . The metaphor of the kotatsu can be used to show that it is a prior and more fundamental lack of security before God that makes people so vulnerable to the threat of shame from people. . . .

When sharing the gospel using the metaphor of the kotatsu, I start by telling a story of a young boy who would gather with other neighborhood children after school around a large warm kotatsu and talk about the day’s events with his grandfather. I paint the scene of a welcoming grandfather who
serves fresh mandarin oranges and barley tea and laughs and plays card games with the children.

Crisis comes one day when the boy, trying to make his friends laugh, makes fun of his grandfather, only to realize that he is standing right behind him. Seeing his grandfather's obvious sadness at the insult, he rushes from his home in embarrassment. After school the next day, he walks home as usual, but as he approaches his grandfather's house and hears the sound of laughter, he crosses over to the other side of the road, not wanting to be reminded of what he had done.

His avoidance continues, and over time he thinks less and less of his grandfather. He looks for new ways to spend time after school and convinces himself that he really isn't missing anything. But inside he is disappointed with himself and tries to make up for it by excelling in school and in sports. But he can't help but feel a sense of shame, inner loneliness, and anxiety. His grandfather sees the changes taking place in his grandson's heart and refuses to give up on him.

If he doesn't act, he knows his grandson will be lost to him forever. So, together with his son, he devises a plan to cover his grandson's shame, and restore him to a place of honor and acceptance at his kotatsu.

. . . The grandson's story is in fact our own. His story points to the reason the world often feels so cold and insecure. . . . Separated from God, the world becomes a cold place. It is in God's presence that humanity fosters qualities of love and acceptance, grace and kindness. Separated from it, we look to the world for warmth and intimacy, but often have to compete for acceptance, face harsh control and unkindness from the various groups we commit to, and in turn often feel a sense of powerlessness and anxiety.

Just as the boy avoided his grandfather, many people avoid God perhaps because thoughts of him bring up buried feelings of shame and unmet obligation. But God is filled with love for us and feels anguish over the pain and anxiety caused by our separation from him. While he will not overlook our actions, he developed a plan to restore us to a place of honor before him (Luke 13:34).

I explain how Jesus, in a sense, left the warmth of heaven's kotatsu and entered the coldness of our world. He willingly endured the things that cause us anxiety and shame for our sakes, in order to show us how a return to God could provide us with the warmth to thrive in a cold world. He was born in disgrace in a stable, raised in a poor family, rejected by his friends and relatives, betrayed by his own disciple, and finally crucified by the very people he came to love (John 1:11, Mark 14:64, Luke 23:34).
But Jesus’ death was not just a demonstration of humanity’s shame, but also a triumph of God’s love. Jesus died for us. Like a parent who takes responsibility for the insult his or her child has caused a neighbor, or the president who resigns to bear the responsibility for the company’s offences, Jesus took our shame upon himself. He took responsibility for our offences, and died in our place on the cross. In so doing, he opened up a seat of honor and acceptance for us before God (2 Cor. 5:21). We can return to the warmth of the kotatsu, and enjoy its security for all eternity.

Sadler’s gospel parable revolves not simply around the kotatsu table, but also around the intrafamily relationships common in Japanese society. The family dynamic of shame is a contextual metaphor explaining the nature of our relationship with God. Overall, the concise story nicely explains the work of Christ in Japan’s cultural language of honor-shame.

The second evangelistic approach—“Back to God’s Village”—retells the biblical story using images and values from a Central Asian village. Jayson’s team developed it as an oral parable (hence its conversational tone).

God is like an honorable elder living in a grand two-story yurt—respected and prestigious. He is perfectly clean, without a single wrinkle on his suit or a speck of dust on his shoes. God is perfectly faithful to do everything he promised; he always keeps his word and helps his family—like the rich uncle who everyone wishes they had.

To show his glory, God created the Tien Shan Mountains and fresh rivers. Then God created Adam and Eve from dirt. “I will grant you my family name and authority to rule over my creation as respected princes.” They were God’s children living in God’s village, crowned with honor and glory. In fact, they had so much honor that they walked around naked and were not even ashamed of it. Could you imagine!

But Satan seduced Eve and Adam with more glory. They ignored God’s word and ate the fruit. For the first time they felt shame and disgrace, like disloyal children. God appeared, saying, “You once ruled the earth, but now you will become a slave to the earth.” Then came the greatest shame—“Leave my village. Because you shamed yourself and me, you must go die elsewhere.” God preserved his honor by banishing shame, like parents who disown a beggar son, or people who keep dirty animals outside their home.

In the new village Adam and Eve began a family. Do you know what it means that we are their children? We inherit their shame. If your grandfather
defected during war, others would think less of you, right? Before God, we were born in a shameful family in a shameful village. And then our own sin adds more shamefulness. Before God, our status as sinners is like a crazy, barren, demon-possessed, naked, homeless person. For this reason, we can't be a part of God's family, so live on the shameful side of the river.

One day in the shameful village someone had an idea: “Let’s create our own honor! We don't need God’s honor! Let's create rules and traditions for everyone on this side of the river to keep, and whoever keeps them will get honor.” Adam’s descendants broke into several groups, each with their own cultural system to cover shame and grant honor. For example, one group said you had to pray five times a day and wear fancy, black suits. But no matter how hard they tried to make a name for themselves, they still couldn’t get back to God's village.

So to help his distant children, God became a human and crossed into the shameful village. Jesus came straight from heaven, so is completely pure and without shame. Could you imagine a big-shot politician leaving his prestigious house to live in a trash dump? Jesus did exactly that!

Jesus’ life was amazing. Jesus was so full of divine honor, anyone became clean and honorable the instant Jesus touched them—even a woman who discharged blood for twelve years. In his teaching, Jesus told stories of how the shamed would be honored in the final day: “One day, God the Father is going to have a big feast on that side of the river in his own yurt, but only invite the shamed and rejected.”

But not everyone liked Jesus because he shamed the honored and honored the shamed. So they publicly shamed him by killing him on a cross. Can you imagine, the only perfectly honorable person being put to such shame! Why? The answer is simple: the shame Jesus bore was not his own, but ours. You know how if you use a rag to remove the dirt from your shoes, the rag becomes dirty. Well, Jesus was like a big white towel that wiped clean everyone's dirt and shame.

But even more incredible, Jesus rose from death to life. He was raised from the ultimate shame of death, crossed back to God's village, received a great name, and sat in the honored seat. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead built a new bridge to God's village so people could leave their shame.

But even after a new bridge was built to the other side of the river, some people did not want to return. The powerful people felt content: “Why would I need God’s honor? I already have enough honor here.” Others approached the bridge, but then second-guessed themselves. “I’m too shameful to enter God’s village. As soon as I set foot on that side, I will be exposed!”
But some decided to follow Jesus to the honorable side. As they crossed the bridge into God’s honorable village, God himself dashed out from his yurt with great joy to embrace each person. God gave everyone who followed Jesus a new golden robe without wrinkle, inheritance documents, and a most honorable seat in his yurt. People finally had real honor. They were freed to love and serve other people, and to be the loyal, honoring child that God always desired.

However, the bridge that Jesus built is only temporary. In the future, Jesus will come again to cleanse the shameful village of all dishonor and impurity. Those who do not follow Jesus and receive God’s honor will be stripped naked and banished to everlasting shame.

The narrative “Back to God’s Village” leverages the village themes of family and purity to explain parallel biblical ideas. No parable or metaphor lines up exactly with the Bible, but this parable includes many key biblical themes in a relatively short span. A number of points will need further explanation—including how one crosses the bridge. But it communicates in honor-shame terms the reality of human lostness, that God has acted to provide salvation, a sense of what that salvation is and that a decision is required.

The final evangelistic example is from Nabeel Jabbour’s book *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*. On a trip to a Third World Muslim country, Jabbour, an Arab American Christian, was invited to speak to a group of forty Muslim villagers for two hours. After praying, he decided to use the three relevant stories about Jesus in Mark 5. Sitting on the floor, with men on one side and women on the other, he shared these stories.11

The first story (Mk 5:1-20) was about Jesus healing the wild, demon-possessed man. Being controlled and enslaved by spirits brought years of shame and isolation to this man. The listeners were amazed that the demonized man recognized and respected Jesus’ status—he bows down before Jesus, saying, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” Jabbour explains the Muslim listeners’ thoughts: “Everyone in the room knew that the demon-possessed man was worthless. He was a menace to the town and to the neighboring village. Why did Jesus give him worth and cast the demons out into the pigs?”12

The second story (Mt 5:21-34) was about Jesus’ willingness to heal the hemorrhaging woman. The illness had depleted her physically, financially and socially. She would have had a low status in the Jewish town. To show
how the woman violated cultural norms by approaching, let alone touching, Jesus, Jabbour read Leviticus 12:1-5 and Leviticus 15:19-23—the Old Testament passages explaining how menstruating women defiled whatever they touched. His Muslim audience practiced ablutions to cleanse before ceremonial prayers, so the story “was addressing their felt need of longing to be clean so they could be acceptable to God.” In Mark 7 Jesus explains that it is relational sins of the heart, not ceremonial defilement, that make a person unclean before God. Jabbour suggests that Jesus exposed the woman—“Who touched my clothes?”—to give her assurance of complete healing and cleansing—“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

The third story was Jesus raising Jairus’s twelve-year-old daughter. Death in many cultures brings about a state of ultimate defilement and separation—as the act of burying someone in the ground indicates. Upon finishing his teaching presentation, the first question came from one of the women. She raised her finger, made a statement, then asked, “I want to believe in Jesus. How do I do it?”

Jabbour’s teaching experience shows the power of simply retelling biblical stories in evangelistic situations. The natural similarities between ancient Jewish culture and daily life in many honor-shame cultures create an easy interpretive bridge. Listeners in the Muslim village naturally understood the honor-shame aspects of salvation intrinsic to the stories. Many cultures intuitively associate demon possession, defilement and death with shame. The three healing stories prove Jesus’ authority to bestow the honor of spiritual freedom, purity and life. The experiences of the healed people in Mark 5 illustrated the nature of biblical salvation as status reversal to Jabbour’s audience from a Muslim village.

**Salvation as Group Membership**

A second motif of salvation in the Bible is inclusion into the group of God’s honored people. God bestows an honorable status on the excluded by welcoming and including them into his new community. Outsiders are now insiders. Kwame Bediako explains this communal element of salvation: “The redeemed now belong within the community of the living God, in the joyful company of the faithful of all ages and climes. They are united through their
union with Christ, in a fellowship infinitely righter than the mere social bonds of lineage, clean, tribe or nation that exclude the stranger as a virtual enemy.\textsuperscript{14} Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:12-14 explain this collective reality.

Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall.

Since the cultural milieu of the early church was predominantly collectivistic, we should expect New Testament epistles to show concern for group identity. In fact, the group-oriented question, who are God’s people? animates the New Testament writings more than, how can I be saved? The individualistic proclivity of Western theologians misreads the communal elements of biblical writings. Krister Stendahl explains, “Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man’s salvation out of a common human predicament.”\textsuperscript{15}

The honor derived from joining God’s prestigious family is good news for people afflicted by shame. Regardless of what false social mechanisms of exclusion they fall victim to, those in Christ are eternally honored and accepted as members in the people of God, with full rights, privileges and status. This new group status is salvation itself. Paul’s letter to the Romans articulates the good news of group membership using a variety of terminology: “justification/righteousness” (Rom 3), “children of Abraham” (Rom 4), “sons/heirs of God” (Rom 8) and “Israel/olive tree” (Rom 9–11).\textsuperscript{16}

The language of “justification” and “righteousness” (Rom 3:21-31; cf. Gal 2:11-20; and our discussion in chap. 5) is one way of articulating a person’s entrance into God’s covenant community. People who respond to the gospel by faith are considered dikaios, “righteous,” and “within the covenant.”\textsuperscript{17} The term “justification by faith” is a shorthand way of declaring whom God now considers his true community; faith in the Messiah, not observing Jewish cultural distinctives, marks a person in God’s family (i.e., “justified”).\textsuperscript{18}

Romans 4 redefines descent from Abraham—the father of all who believe.\textsuperscript{19} The question of Abrahamic descent is significant because God
promised that Abraham’s children would become an honored group (Gen 12:2-3). Through Abraham-like faith in the Creator, and not through being ethnic Israel (Rom 9:6-8), we obtain the honorable heritage of Abraham, which is to become the people of God’s promise and possessors of a great inheritance.20

Romans 8 (cf. Gal 4) uses the powerful family language of adoption and inheritance to define those in Christ. Believers are considered rightful co-heirs with Christ of God’s promises (Rom 8:17). Inheritance symbolizes honor by affirming the boundaries of worthy descendants; it assumes a kinship relationship. Once orphans without a name, we have become children of God adopted into his family (Rom 8:16-21). In honor-shame cultures, one’s family determines one’s status; so divine adoption through the Spirit grants a new status and a prestigious future of glory.

The longest explanation of God’s redefined, new-covenant people is Romans 9–11. Without disregarding the uniqueness of ethnic Israel, Paul says of Gentiles, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people.’ . . . They shall be called children of the living God” (Rom 9:25-26). In other words, Gentile believers in Christ are “grafted into the olive tree” cultivated by God (Rom 11:17-24). Longtime outsiders are now members of the group!

In Romans Paul expounds this gospel: God worked decisively in Jesus to create his own family, and salvific inclusion into this honored community is available to people from all groups. Salvation is group membership. Salvation in Romans is more about entrance into God’s covenant community than entrance into heaven. Even Paul’s incorporative phrase “in Christ” speaks of the new honorable status of belonging to the Messiah’s community. This salvation is mediated through grace—God’s acceptance of the shamed. Salvation from God trivializes every group’s false claim to honor, whether based on Jewish Torah observance, Roman imperial power or Greek wisdom. Only in being honored by God through Christ’s shameful death on behalf of the shameful can humans be integrated into God’s community and bear eternal honor (Rom 2:7; 9:23; 10:13).21 This is the good news!

First Peter articulates such salvation this way: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. . . . Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet 2:9-10 ESV).
**Telling the Story of Group Membership**

So how can Christians today practically communicate the gospel as incorporation into God’s family? The short answer: use relational and communal language. To address the issue of shame in evangelistic encounters, one should explain salvation using the conceptual metaphors of family, relationships and community. Sin is fundamentally a relational problem, and salvation is a restoration of broken relationships, so they must be communicated accordingly. The following words represent group language for explaining the gospel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loyalty</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>Allegiance</td>
<td>Feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritance</td>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>(Dis)grace</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Defilement</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humiliation</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverence</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>Disgrace</td>
<td>Unclean</td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron(age)</td>
<td>Worthy</td>
<td>Glory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purity</td>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Dishonor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Telling the story of salvation (i.e., creation-fall-Israel-Jesus-salvation) using the above word set will probably feel like speaking a second language, a bit unnatural and strained. For Western Christians, legal language is the default language for communicating theology; it comes out automatically. These judicial words commonly appear in evangelistic presentations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Transgression</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Right/wrong</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Acquittal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>Condemnation</td>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>Penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Payment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Merit</td>
<td>Debt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commands</td>
<td>Wrath</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Pardon</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Of the two word sets above, which is more theologically familiar to you? We have observed that many Western Christians portray salvation as a
courtroom scene. Note the judicial terminology (in italics) in this gospel summary: We are *guilty* of *violating the law*. Since God is *just*, he must *judge* sin (i.e., *personal wrongdoing*). *Restitution* must be made to *right a wrong*. Jesus pays our *penalty* and appeases *wrath* so *justice is satisfied*. We are *forgiven* of our *transgressions*, our sins are *pardoned* and we are made *innocent*.

We note the strong legal emphasis of most evangelistic presentations not to imply that all legal-oriented evangelism is wrong, but to increase self-awareness. The first step toward articulating the gospel relevantly in honor-shame contexts is becoming aware of your own default language in spiritual conversations. Learning a second language often requires a new understanding of your first language. For people coming from a Western mentality, communicating the gospel from an honor-shame perspective is an acquired skill. One must be intentional to learn and practice it, or will likely resort to the default language.

The various forms of gospel proclamation originating from Western contexts (e.g., printed tract, personal testimony, oral sermon) follow a common pattern—transgression, guilt, restitution, confession and forgiveness. This basic paradigm corresponds to the guilt-innocence narrative structure explained in chapter four. As expected, this evangelistic framework employs judicial and legal imagery. Table 8.1 compares this traditional approach with an honor-shame alternative.

**Table 8.1. Two paradigms of salvation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Process of Salvation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Guilt Based</strong></th>
<th><strong>Shame Based</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem of sin</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transgression</strong>&lt;br&gt;People have broken God’s law through a particular action.</td>
<td><strong>Unfaithfulness</strong>&lt;br&gt;People have broken the relationship with God by being disloyal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dilemma of humans</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guilt</strong>&lt;br&gt;Our moral violations merit punishment.</td>
<td><strong>Shame</strong>&lt;br&gt;Our disgrace merits banishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solution of Jesus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Restitution</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jesus satisfies the legal requirements of justice by enduring retribution for us.</td>
<td><strong>Restoration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jesus bears shame to reconcile the relationship by repairing honor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response of faith</strong></td>
<td><strong>Confession</strong>&lt;br&gt;People must acknowledge their wrongdoing.</td>
<td><strong>Allegiance</strong>&lt;br&gt;People must be loyal to honoring God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Result of salvation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Forgiveness</strong>&lt;br&gt;God pardons wrongdoings and declares lawbreakers to be innocent.</td>
<td><strong>Honor</strong>&lt;br&gt;God makes outcasts his children and exalts people to eternal glory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The column on the far right suggests an alternative way to structure the gospel in honor-shame terms—unfaithfulness, shame, restoration, allegiance and then honor. Relational and communal language explains how Jesus rescues people from spiritual shame before God. As you develop reproducible methods of evangelism, or share informally with people, you may consider this basic framework to structure evangelistic presentations.

Contextualizing evangelism involves more than just repackaging evangelistic presentations. The social realities of honor and shame affect our understanding of the entire conversion process. Verbal explanation of the gospel in honor-shame is only one aspect of Christian witness. The means by which we proclaim the gospel must also be adapted to the cultural context. Contextualizing the gospel means adapting the process, not just content, of our evangelism to account for hearers’ honor-shame tendencies, as we discuss in the next chapter, about conversion.

**Discussion and Application Questions**

1. In your cultural setting, what are the primary causes and sources of honor and/or shame?
2. What are the primary ways you encounter and meet nonbelievers? Do those relational bridges communicate dignity and honor to people?
3. In three or four sentences, how would you explain the gospel in honor-shame terms?