

# **Dr. David deSilva, The Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 2, Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Honor and Shame**

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This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament. This is session 2, Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Honor and Shame.

Attention to the cultural context and values of honor and shame can be a very helpful way to read a New Testament book, a text that emerges from that cultural world and addresses situations shaped by that cultural world.

In regards to 1 Peter in particular, it would appear that the addressee's experience of being shamed is a primary motivator for the writing of the text itself. There's evidence throughout 1 Peter that this is the primary presenting challenge that Peter is addressing. For example, we read, keep living honorably among the Gentiles in order that although they slander you as though you were evildoers, they may observe your honorable deeds and glorify God on the day of God's visitation.

Notice prominently there the mention of the experience of being slandered on the part of these early Christians by those who are outside of the church. Then, slightly later, this is a gift if, for the sake of his or her mindfulness of God, a person endures affliction, suffering unjustly. There is a mention of being afflicted or abused in some way, specifically because of one's attachment to God as understood and practiced in the Christian congregation.

In chapter 3, even if you should suffer on account of what is just, you are privileged. Keep your conscience clean so that when you are slandered, those who keep abusing your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. In the fourth chapter, even more evidence in this regard is that they, that is to say, your neighbors, are put off because you no longer run along with them into the same flood of disgraceful behavior, and so they slander.

Later in the same chapter, Beloved, do not be put off by the fiery trial taking place among you as a test. Instead, rejoice to the extent that you are sharing Christ's sufferings. If you are reproached in Christ's name, you are privileged.

If anyone among you suffers as a Christian, don't be ashamed, but give God honor because you bear this name. From these passages that run throughout the text of 1 Peter, we see that the author is addressing a group of Christians who are being insulted, slandered, reproached, at the very least in the case of Christian slaves in the houses of non-Christian masters, being beaten or otherwise physically affronted

because of their commitment to the Christian gospel and its practice. What is motivating the slander, the reproach, the, in some cases, physical abuse on the part of outsiders? The goal of the Christian's neighbors would be to use shame to use deviancy control techniques in order to correct deviant behavior based on deviant convictions.

Shaming is a kind of social control here. Why would the Christian's non-Christian neighbors respond in this way to the converts, to Christian converts in their midst? From the perspective of non-Christians, there were some fairly legitimate complaints to be lodged against the Christian movement growing in its midst. For example, the Christian hope depends upon the overturning of the Roman peace.

Christians were looking for a savior, a messiah, really a king who would come to establish his kingdom on earth. Thus, the current world order, on the stability of which most people thought their well-being depended, was in the way of and would need to be removed in order to make way for the fulfillment of the Christian's hope. They were, therefore, not supporters of the Roman peace, the Roman world.

Also, these non-Christians, as they observed the activity of the converts, noticed that good gods-fearing people were now ceasing to give the gods upon whom, upon whose favor and gifts the majority depended, the honor that was their due. So, as the church grew in a given locale, non-Christians would see, rather, that the affront to their gods was growing in their midst. They also noticed that Christians withdrew their presence from almost every civic gathering, social gathering, or even private social event or dinner.

Thus, those who converted to the Christian movement were perceived to begin to act in highly antisocial ways. This, of course, is tied to Christian avoidance of idolatry because, again, virtually every civic feast or festival was around some idolatrous ritual. Even the private dinner party would have included, just like pious Christians would say, grace, which would include some act of honoring the gods or giving thanks to the gods, perhaps in the form of libations, pouring out wine upon the ground, or the offering of incense at the domestic shrine of the householder in the house where the party was being held.

So, these changes in behavior, these changes in allegiance, and these changes in hope led non-Christian neighbors of Christian converts, perhaps quite understandably, to be surprised at the new behavior of their former colleagues, friends, and associates, even to be estranged or alienated, which is how I would treat the verb in First Peter 4:4. Not only are they surprised, but really, they are estranged. The Greek word *ksenizdantai* they are made to feel like outsiders to your new behaviors, which excludes them, those who used to be included along with you. Christians had a number of options in this situation.

They could yield to the social pressures of shame being inflicted upon them by their neighbors. They could re-engage those practices that their neighbors required of them to regard them as worthwhile and supportive members of the larger system. Or they could choose against such rehabilitation.

They could find ways in which to come to grips with their experience of being shamed so that these experiences of shame would not debilitate them and would not quench the fire of their new life in Christ. First Peter is written to help these Christians choose the latter option, not to give in to the social pressure of shame, but to find ways to cope with the experience of shame, even though they were very sensitive. They were honor-sensitive people.

They were very sensitive to the negative impact of those experiences. Now, the author uses several strategies for deflecting shame and neutralizing its effects. First, he insulates his audience against their neighbor's attempts to shame them by explaining why the judgment of outsiders is fundamentally flawed and not a reliable indicator of the convert's true worth.

Second, he further insulates them by reinterpreting those experiences of shaming and rejection in a way that continued resistance and endurance emerge as the noble response to their situation. The author also contributes very positively to their identity formation by speaking at some length about the basis for their honor as Christians, by affirming the group's genuine honor in God's sight, as well as by directing their focus to other people who would similarly reflect back their honor on the basis of their allegiance to Christ, their obedience to God's call. So, as a way into the rhetorical strategy, the pastoral strategy of 1 Peter, we might first consider how the author removes non-Christians from the court of reputation that matters so that the shame that the Christians are experiencing becomes easier to bear, becomes less meaningful for the Christian's own sense of honor.

The author of 1 Peter reminds the hearers that they made a conscious decision to disassociate themselves from their former way of life, which remains the lifestyle of the people around them. The converts had rejected doing what their fellow Gentiles liked because they considered the way of life to which they were being called to be a more honorable way, doing what God wants, as opposed to what God rejects as valueless or even as abominable. Their conversion to Christianity itself was a judgment upon their neighbors and, thus, a judgment upon their neighbor's ability to distinguish between what is honorable and what is not honorable.

The convert's neighbors lived dishonorably themselves. The author keeps reminding the hearers of this fact. In chapter 4, verse 3, he speaks about the non-Christian neighbors still indulging in impure acts, impure desires, drunken spells, feasts, revels, and unseemly idolatries.

He speaks of their lives as a flood of debased living. He explains that the neighbors' hostility and their desire to shame the converts comes from their neighbors' feeling of being alienated from the Christian converts, who have actually done well to dissociate themselves from their neighbors' sinful behavior. The non-Christian neighbors who are disparaging the Christian convert are the ones who are headed for a fall on account of their disobedience to the word, that every word that the converts have obeyed and that, therefore will lead to honor for them.

And so, the author, throughout the letter, presents the outsiders, the non-Christians, as the ones who are in God's sight, ultimately the deviant ones, the ones who are out of line. Therefore, any shaming that these deviants, the non-Christians, impose on the Christians shouldn't be taken seriously. It comes from the non-Christians' alienation from God and God's truth and could only lead the Christians astray were they to give in to it.

The convert's former way of life, which remains the non-Christian neighbor's way of life, is spoken of as darkness, which is a standard image in the ancient world, but persisting into the modern world, an image for ignorance, for a lack of knowledge, not having all the facts so that one could form a reliable opinion of the truth. The author speaks of the empty way of life inherited from the ancestors. This is a reminder to the converts not only of their own past and the valuelessness of their pre-Christian past but also of the way of life that their neighbors continue to live.

It's a life of being conformed to one's passions and one's desires, aroused in ignorance rather than on the basis of reliable knowledge of what was truly valuable, desirable, or good. The non-Christian neighbors, then, are attempting to shame the Christians back into a less honorable, more limited way of life. So, their censure is merely slander, as the author puts it, unfounded negative speech.

It is the ignorance of foolish people that the nobility of the Christian convert's lives will ultimately show up to be such. The author also suggests that it's really not the Christians who are on trial here in this crucible of being shamed and disgraced. It's really the non-Christians who are on trial and being proven negatively.

For this strategy, I would first take us to the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who flourished around 80 to 100 AD. So, after the active New Testament period, but nevertheless still very helpful. Epictetus writes, if the one who has power over you says, I hold you to be impious and profane, what has really happened to you? You have been pronounced impious and profane and nothing more.

If the person had passed judgment upon some syllogism and had declared I judge the statement, if it is day, there is light, to be false, what has happened to the syllogism? Who is being judged in this case? Who has been condemned? The syllogism or the person who has formed a false judgment about it? Should the sage then pay

attention to an uninstructed person when the latter passes judgment on what is holy and unholy, on what is just and unjust? The author of 1 Peter engages in a similar kind of argument as Epictetus in chapter two of his epistle. Instead of a syllogism, though, being judged, what we have is Jesus being judged. Is Jesus recognized to be a precious, honored cornerstone, or is Jesus treated as a stone rejected, to be rejected by human beings? Using language from the Old Testament scriptures, from Psalm 118, 117 in the Greek translation of the Septuagint, Peter talks about Jesus as the living stone, rejected as worthless by human beings, but choice and precious in God's sight.

The stone that the builders rejected became the head of the corner. So, really, who is being judged here? The stone? No, but the builders who reject the stone. They are shown to have made a false opinion about the value of this stone because God has chosen that stone to be the cornerstone, and the builders didn't understand it.

They treated the stone as a toss-off block to be removed. So, the scripture, the Psalm text, becomes an authoritative statement that the estimation of human beings, the builders, or the non-Christian outsiders, is not the last word on a person's or a thing's worth. The other text that the author weaves in is from Isaiah, chapter 28.

Look, I set in Zion a stone, a choice, precious cornerstone, and the person who depends on it will never be put to shame. By blending this second text in, the author identifies God's estimation as the only important one, as God can make the toss-off reject, the stone that the builders rejected, into, in fact, the cornerstone. The author calls the hearers, calls his audience, to counter feelings of shame, of being shamed by outsiders, by developing healthy self-respect based on the embodiment of ideals and virtues that they know to be held in esteem, both within and beyond the Christian culture.

So, for example, immediately following the paragraph in 1 Peter that we've been talking about, the author exhorts the hearers, using the familiar ethical topic of mastering the passions, mastering one's desires for the sake of virtues. So, he writes, I exhort you to abstain from the fleshly desires that wage war against your soul, keeping your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. Now, this topic of mastery of passions was very common, one in Stoic ethical discourse and one in Aristotelian ethical discourse.

It becomes commonplace to think about the way to virtue and, therefore, the way to live honorably. We must master those cravings within us, those urges within us that drive us toward vice, that cripple our commitment to virtue. And so the author of 1 Peter, here, is using this topic in a way to help Christians reassure themselves that they are, in fact, fulfilling the culture's highest desires for them, the highest, I should say, the culture's highest ideals for them, even if outsiders don't recognize it.

In another related vein, Christian slaves of non-Christian masters are empowered by the author to act as the guardians of their own conduct, making sure that they do not behave in such a way as to offer unnecessary causes for punishment. In this passage in 220 and following, the author seems to urge submission in many ways to non-Christian masters, but he doesn't do so in a way that takes away their power to resist where the Christian, sorry, I keep saying that, where the non-Christian master is trying to compel the slave to do some act that would violate his or her allegiance to the one God. Thus, a slave can endure some form of degradation and can submit to some punishment as a result of his or her commitment to maintain a pure conscience before God.

And what the author is, in effect, doing is saying to that slave, when that happens, don't worry about that. That's not you have been bad. That's you standing up for God and suffering unjustly for it, and thus empowering the person least empowered in the Greco-Roman world, the slave, to continue to do that kind of behavior that leads to his or her master inflicting punishment, assuring them that they continue nevertheless in God's favor.

The slave is empowered to formulate an evaluation of his or her own master. If the master abstains from degrading the Christian slave for his or her commitment to Christian values and practices, then that master is a good and gentle one, using the language of 1 Peter 2.20. But if the master inflicts shame and pain upon the Christian slave because of his or her commitment to Christian values and practices, then the master is the crooked and perverse one. Here, we have a variant of that same question.

Who is being judged here? The slave or the master? The author, 1 Peter, says in this instance, it's the master who's being judged by whether or not that master punishes good Christian conduct among his or her slaves. Finally, along the same lines, the author asks the rhetorical question, who is the person who will hurt you if you are an enthusiast for the good? The fact is, though, that some non-Christians are hurting some Christians who are themselves enthusiasts for doing what is good in God's sight. So, what we find here is that the author presents non-Christians acting completely irrationally in ways that are out of line with any rational expectation for human behavior because they are, in fact, punishing people who just want to do what's good in God's sight, namely the Christian converts.

There may be many such people, many non-Christians, acting this way, but that does not make them any less the truly deviant ones. And so, the author continues in the very next verse, even if you should happen to suffer on account of justice, you would be privileged. Against all rational expectations, the Christians are suffering disgrace and abuse for righteousness' sake.

This doesn't signal that something is wrong with them, but rather that something is defective in their neighbors who respond thus to their change of lifestyle. The author, thus, throughout his pastoral letter, put his hearers in a position to determine whether or not shame, reproach, or any other social sanction is being justly imposed upon them, and if not, to disregard the sting, the weight, the social force of any imposition of shame. One can compare again what 1 Peter is doing with what we find in Greco-Roman philosophical texts.

For example, a writing by Seneca, whom we encountered in the first lecture as a first-century philosopher and statesman, is written in a tract called *On the Constancy of the Wise Man*. Both schools, referring to Stoics and Epicureans, both schools urge you to scorn injuries and what the shadows and suggestions of injuries are insults. One doesn't need to be a wise person to despise injuries and insults, but merely a person of sense, one who can say to himself or herself, do I or do I not deserve that these things befall me? If I do deserve them, there is no insult; it is justice, but if I don't deserve them, the one who does the injustice is the one to blush.

As we've seen then throughout 1 Peter, the author is using a very similar strategy with his Christian audience, urging them to ask these questions. Do I deserve the shame that I'm experiencing? Did I do anything legitimately wrong in the sight of God? If so, I should stop doing it. If not, it's those people outside the church who should blush because they are behaving counter to what is honorable.

Now, throughout this letter, we also find Peter reinterpreting experiences of shame in ways that make them not only easier to bear but turn the experience of shame itself into a venue for gaining honor, where honor matters most, namely in God's sight. One strategy that he uses is to speak of the addressees' various trials as the proving ground of the genuineness of their faith and their commitment to God. We find this in 1 Peter 1: 6-7, and again later in 4:12. God uses hardships to prove the worth of the righteous or the wise person and to test the reality, the genuineness of their virtue because anyone can be virtuous when it doesn't cost anything.

Hence, this framing device. Will you be virtuous when it costs you? If so, I have proven the genuineness of your commitment to what is honorable. Their neighbors' censure and rejection become opportunities for the believers to attain greater, quoting from 1 Peter, praise and glory and honor when Christ himself returns in glory.

That's 1 Peter 1:7 and 14. Second, the author defines being on the margins of society as the new normal. He doesn't want the experience of being marginalized to impress upon the Christian converts the idea that, hey, we're in the wrong place.

We have deviated from the normal path from where we ought to be. Instead, the author protects the converts from experiencing alienation on account of the

resistance and disapproval with which they've met. Don't be surprised by this, he writes.

Don't be put off by this experience. The example of Jesus plays a very important role, once again, in normalizing the experience of being treated like a deviant. Jesus is the new norm for Christian converts, and Jesus himself experienced, or I should say, the pattern of Jesus itself was a pattern of attaining honor through rejection, enduring scorn, and suffering.

The author even writes that it was the foreordained plan of God foretold to the prophets that Christ would enter into the glories that would follow after suffering. The experience of Jesus, therefore, both normalizes the disciples' experience of shame, of being subjected to society's deviancy control techniques, and also provides a precedent for the expectation that continued endurance will lead to honor, just as Jesus passed through the ultimate degradation, rejection, slander, condemnation as a criminal, and crucifixion on the way to entering into glory after being vindicated by God, so the Christian could expect that walking in the way of the cross would lead to vindication and the future experience of lasting honor in God's sight. Thus, the author can write that it's better to suffer for what is right, for doing what is right, if God so wills, than for doing what is wrong, specifically because Christ also suffered once and for all on account of sins, the just person for unjust people.

Or, even more directly, in 1 Peter 2.20 and following, Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving behind an example for you in order that you should follow in his footsteps. Again, in chapter 4, the author appeals to the experience of Jesus as the experience of one's suffering as the new norm to be embodied. Since Jesus, sorry, since Christ then suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves as well with the same mindset.

The person who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin in order to live for the remainder of his or her time in the flesh, no longer for what people crave but for what God wants. The author can specifically tie the end of Christ's story with the end of the disciple's story as an honorable end, as, for example, in 4.13, rejoice to the extent that you share Christ's sufferings, in order that when his glory is manifested, you may exalt exceedingly. Because the pattern of Christ is the God-ordained path for bringing disciples through this upside-down world to a place of honor in God's presence, those who are reproached or shamed on account of Christ's name, are actually, in the end, the privileged ones, the blessed ones.

Because the same God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory is calling the converts into glory after they suffer in a similar manner for a short while, now, even in the midst of this, for example, of using Christ's story as a template for establishing that enduring shame is the path to lasting honor in God's sight, even in the midst of that, the author does not dismiss the real difficulties and the real sense of displacement that the converts potentially face because their neighbors are

shaming them, rejecting them. He knows that they are now living as people who no longer experience being at home in their communities, who no longer belong.

And so, he can speak of them as resident aliens and as people who are sojourning or living as foreigners now, even in their home cities. With these terms, he acknowledges their very real sense of displacement, but he also insists they are not merely resident aliens. They are chosen resident aliens.

They are resident aliens chosen according to God's foreknowledge, as the author puts it from the very opening address. This identity of the resident alien within a diaspora, within a scattered people of God, offers to the Christian converts a recognizable historic identity from Scripture because the people of God historically had suffered scattering, first with the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel, but also anticipating and as a consequence of the Babylonian conquest of the southern kingdom of Judah. This holds up another normalizing lens for the addressees to interpret their own experience.

Our sense of being displaced, of now being diaspora even in our hometown, is a kind of reproduction of the identity that God's historic people had to endure centuries ago. Their displacement within their host society, therefore, is appropriate for people who have been gathered into God's elect people, this new Israel of Jew and Gentile. The author also assures the believers that the resistance and losses they were enduring were not a sign that they were out of favor with God but just the opposite.

It is proof that they were moving in precisely the direction that God was leading. In the ancient world, as still in the modern world, because just to be honest, it's still kind of a knee-jerk reaction with me; if something bad happens, I think, did I do something wrong? Is this somehow a punishment for something I've done? That was very much hardwired into the thinking of people in the ancient world. If something bad happens to you, it's because of some God, or in Jewish culture, it's because the one God is unhappy with you.

However, the author of 1 Peter assures the hearers that this is not the model for interpreting their experience; it is just the opposite. The fact that bad things are happening to you means you're exactly in the will of God. Again, first and foremost, because of the example of the Christ whom you follow, who entered into glory through suffering.

The author can write about them as people suffering according to the will of God, which is a very foreign concept in the ancient world. Usually, it'd be suffering because of the will of the God who didn't like you or who was displeased with you, but now suffering in alignment with God's will for you because of the paradigm of Christ in whose footsteps you are following, with the hope of entering into glory in God's presence forever. On the basis of this, the author says the right response is not

to avoid the shaming, not to avoid the unpleasant experiences, but simply to keep entrusting your life to the faithful creator as you continue to do what is good in his sight.

The author reminds the hearers that though where they are may feel unpleasant at the moment because they are so displaced, because they have lost their place at home in this world, and have not yet really fully entered into their eternal home so that they could enjoy the sense of belonging in God's eternal kingdom, the author reminds them that even though this is unpleasant, they left behind their old life for very good reasons. Early in the letter, Peter writes that it was God himself who provided for their redemption from a futile way of life, dissociation from which is the cause of their present suffering, but they left that futile way of life behind for very good reasons, and their suffering now in accordance with God's will means they are moving in the direction that God wants for them, even though their neighbors are responding to them with hostility, just as they had responded to Jesus before them. In the midst of the censure and the insult that they endure, God nevertheless associates God's own self with the converts by means of his Holy Spirit.

So, Peter writes, if you are insulted on account of the name of Christ, you are privileged because the spirit of glory, which is the spirit of God, rests upon you. Far from separating them from God, far from suggesting that they are suffering God's displeasure, the Christian's endurance of trials rather confirms their intimate connection with God, for they experience precisely what God's own son experienced, and they enjoy the intimate connection with God that the Holy Spirit affords in the midst of their trials. The believers are assured thereby that their experience of shame, pain, and marginalization doesn't mean the loss of God's favor, but is, on the contrary, proof that, as the author puts it, you stand in favor with God.

In embracing the cost of loyalty to Jesus and the cost of obedience to the one God, the convert is actually giving God God's due honor, for he or she is bearing witness to the value of God's friendship and the value of God's promises before the eyes of his or her neighbors. The author brings these themes out in chapter 4, verse 16. The convert is therefore encouraged not even to feel shame, not to internalize the social pressure from outside, so as to reject that aspect of himself or herself that the disapproving members of the system, the outside world, find objectionable.

Fourth, the author sets the hearer's struggle with the experience of being shamed against another interpretative backdrop, the cosmic framework of a spiritual war over their lives. Toward the end of his pastoral letter, the author writes, be sober, watch out, your enemy, the devil, is walking about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, remaining firm in your trust, knowing that your sisters and brothers throughout the world face the same kinds of suffering.

In this passage, the non-Christian neighbor's attempts to rehabilitate the Christians are interpreted as their cosmic enemy's attempts to disqualify them from God's good goal for them. The author thereby repositions them to see resistance to these social pressures as the path to an honorable victory. It's resistance to their cosmic enemy, to Satan's attempts to make them trip up in their Godward journey.

Now, we have spoken in our first lecture about how people defend their honor in the challenge-repost kind of social interaction. We looked at how Jesus defended his honor when the synagogue official challenged it by challenging the propriety of healing on the Sabbath. If an honorable person is subjected to insult or some other challenge to honor, that person is culturally conditioned to retaliate, offering a repost that will counter the challenge and preserve honor in the public eye.

It falls, of course, to the bystanders to decide whether or not the challenged person has successfully defended his own honor. And in these sorts of contests, it usually is a him, a he that's involved. Christian leaders, like Peter, sought to cultivate a specifically Christian repost.

The followers of Jesus will meet challenges to their honor, but not by using the same currency of insult or violence that the outside world throws at them. The example of Jesus once more is the starting point for the author's reflection. He writes in chapter 2, verses 22 and following, when Jesus was reviled, he did not repost with more reviling in kind, but instead, he committed himself to the one who judges justly, that is to God.

The author calls all Christians then to respond to their detractors by following Christ's example, quoting from 3, verse 9, not returning injury for injury, not returning insult for insult, but on the contrary, extending blessing, for to this you are called in order that you might inherit a blessing. The author maintains the hope that eventually, by doing good, by returning good when presented with evil, the Christians will win over their neighbors will overturn the reproach that their neighbors cast upon them as they see that the Christians really are generous-hearted, beneficent, respectful, sorry, respectable citizens. Thus, the author hopes by this kind of repost, by returning good for evil, the author hopes that the Christian will, quote, silence the ignorant slander of foolish people, as we read in 2:13 to 3:15. Rather than either yield to a feeling of shame or repost in a manner that would antagonize, the Christians are called to be ready to give a gentle but committed verbal defense, an apologia, a defense speech in 3.15 for their new commitments and practices, their commitment to Jesus and the one God.

The author wants them to know why they themselves have made their choices and, thus, why they are not going to give up, continuing in the same direction that they began with their conversion. And they want the author wants the converts to use this, moreover, as an opportunity to bear witness to their hope as Christians. The

author here in 3:15 to 16 returns again to the conviction that sooner or later, the virtuous conduct of the Christian group will win over their neighbors to their witness and make those who now shame the Christians ashamed themselves.

We mentioned that leaders of minority groups and minority cultures gave a lot of attention to insulating their group members against the shame or rejection of outsiders, reinterpreting the experience of shame and rejection in ways that would facilitate ongoing endurance and commitment to the minority group. But we also mentioned that these group leaders also typically found it important to affirm the honor that their group members currently enjoyed in the eyes of those whose opinions really mattered. And as with the Jewish minority culture, so also with the Christian minority culture, being honored in God's sight was a prominent topic in this regard.

Joining the Christian movement may have brought the Christians shame in the eyes of outsiders, those who remain in the dark about God, but it has also brought them greater honor in the most important court of opinion, the court of God and the court of those who have been illumined by God's light, namely fellow Christians. And so, the author, throughout this pastoral word, draws attention to the opinion of the one God: those who currently heap shame upon the Christians will one day give account to the one who stands prepared to judge the living and the dead. These converts enjoy an immensely privileged position vis-a-vis outsiders to the Christian group who overtly disobey the one God.

The testing that Christians now endure may be difficult, but the sifting that awaits those outside the Christian group is far more severe, and its outcome far more dire. The author assures the hearers that honor lies ahead of them. The genuineness of their faith manifested through these tests will redound again to quote 1 Peter 1.7, will redound unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The author cites in 1 Peter 2:7 an authoritative word of God as proof of the certainty of the convert's ultimate vindication. That word comes from Isaiah 28 verse 16, whoever believes in him, whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame. From this, the author deduces in 1 Peter 2:7 that honor then is for you who believe, just as honor came to the one who had been rejected by mortals but was chosen and precious in God's estimation.

Honor, however, is not merely a future promise for the converts. The author dwells at length upon the honor they now enjoy by virtue of their reception of the gospel and their obedience to that word. He speaks about God giving them a new birth to a living hope in 1:3. They are reborn by virtue of the word to an unending life rather than continuing to live out a life that is subject to death and decay.

This is the upshot of chapter 1, verse 23. The legacy of this new birth which they've been granted is, quoting 1:4 and 5, an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who are being guarded by God's power through trust for a deliverance that is ready to be revealed in the last season. The author reminds them of their value in God's sight, a value demonstrated in the price God paid, quote, the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless, unblemished lamb, a price paid to buy the disciples back from their former life with its futile ways.

This image, incidentally, is a very powerful one to separate the converts from their past life, that life back to which their neighbors are trying to draw them, because coming out of that life was purchased at no less a price than the very death of Jesus, the death, as it were, of Christ as a spotless unblemished lamb. To give in to their neighbor's shaming tactics would amount to undoing all the good that Christ's death did for them. As these converts gather then, like living stones around Jesus, the living stone, they share in honor of the choice, a precious cornerstone, as they continue to be fitted together around Christ into a spiritual house.

Peter invests them with the high dignity of being named a holy priesthood, a company set apart for special service and access to the Almighty God. Later in the same chapter, in chapter 2, verse 9, the author applies an avalanche of honorific titles to the hearers. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's special possession.

They have moved from a shameful place, the place of the non-Christians, to a new frontier of nobility, a basis for self-esteem and moral courage rooted in their relationship with God and one another. All of this honor, by the way, is at stake if they give in to the shaming techniques to the social pressure of their neighbors. If they accept being rehabilitated by their neighbors, by the non-Christians, they lose all the honor that the author affirms that they have gained in Christ.

The author goes on to say in 2:10, they have moved from a shameful place, a place that the author can describe as darkness, an identity of being no people at all, a futile way of life, a life conformed to the desires that people entertain in ignorance, a life of running along with their neighbors in a flood of dissipation. And they have moved from that to a place of great honor, to God's marvelous light, probably also including the sense of being enlightened about the real parameters of life in this world before the one God. They have moved from no identity to being identified as God's own people, a life of purification through obedient response to God and abstaining from the carnal passions that stain a person's virtue.

And rather than running with their neighbors into a flood of dissipation, now they run after the will of God rather than human cravings. The author thus draws a picture of their life as Christians as a much more honorable life than the life that they left

behind. Therefore, hopefully, this will motivate these converts not to give in to their neighbors' pressure to go back to that older, less honorable way of life.

Honor, we have said, is a social value. It depends on other people to maintain. I can only hold on to my different definitions of what is honorable on my own so long.

I need a group of significant others to help reflect these back to me and affirm me to the extent that I embody these values. And thus, First Peter also gives a fair amount of attention to reinforcing this social matrix that enables perseverance. That is to say, the Christian community itself must provide the social support and the personal affirmation necessary to keep individuals from crossing back into their former way of life and their former networks of support.

Thus, the author urges the hearers from beginning to end in this vein to show one another an unfeigned brotherly and sisterly love, constant from the heart, to seek harmony and unity in 3:8, to display ungrudging mutual support and hospitality in 4:8 to 11, and to bear themselves toward one another with that gentle humility that nurtures solidarity and harmony in chapter 5 verses 3 and 6. It is essential that the relational bonds within the group become more valuable, more powerful, and more important than the relational capital that outsiders have. The relationships of Christian husbands and wives receive special attention in regard to the affirmation of believers' honor. Speaking to the husbands, the author writes, in your living together, give consideration to your wives as to the weaker gender, offering honor to the woman as to someone who is also a joint heir with you of the gracious gift of life.

This is actually a text that often gets butchered in translation. The pairing of motivations and actions tends to get blurred, but I've represented here in a way that parallels the Greek phrasing very closely. The author says that one should give consideration to one's wife on the basis of the fact that she is physically weaker, which is often the case, not always the case, but certainly, in the ancient world, it's quite often the case.

But also to offer honor to the Christian wife on the basis of her being a joint heir with you. That is to say, the consideration kind of dovetails with ancient stereotypes of the woman as the more fragile member of the pair. But the command to give honor dovetails with the distinctively Christian identification of the Christian wife as a co-heir of glory.

That is to say, in a relationship more akin to that of sisters and brothers in a household, which is a much more equal relationship for the record, than a hierarchical rule such as husband and wives tend to be in the ancient world. Now, our considerations of honor and shame language in 1 Peter and the dynamics that the audience of 1 Peter, the addressees of 1 Peter faced, and the kind of rhetorical strategy that Peter uses to help them meet the challenges of the situation have

definite implications for Christians today. I'm not going to dwell on all of the possibilities, but rather move us to consider one that seems to me rather pressing as we consider the case of the global church.

By way of review, let me say that the author of 1 Peter attempts to empower his hearers to maintain the new direction that they had chosen for their lives in the face of the pressures they are experiencing from outside that aims to subvert their commitment and make them betray the insights they had that led to their conversion. The author helps them define the symbolic and the social resources that they need in order to maintain their own moral choices in the face of their neighbor's contrary pressure. Embodying the word and the strategies found in 1 Peter would most reliably begin where we find similar social dynamics facing the community of faith.

A significant portion of the global family of God is in many non-Western countries, for example, India, China, Indonesia, Nigeria, many Islamic countries, and in former times, the Soviet Union. Christians in these countries continue to face censure, discrimination, loss of privilege, and means of subsistence, even imprisonment and death as the dominant and the majority cultures in those areas continue to use all the deviancy control techniques at their disposal to correct Christians. 1 Peter suggests avenues by which to support Christians in restricted and hostile environments.

This is particularly useful because many of those environments are themselves honor and shame cultures. So, 1 Peter's address to them is very direct, culturally speaking. But what could we do if we happen to be watching this living outside of those environments? 1 Peter suggests that we might put ourselves in contact with the persecuted, encouraging our sisters and brothers in their noble contest.

The text suggests making the reality of the church as a social matrix for perseverance to be felt more keenly, that is to say, to provide more direct and more ample social support for our Christian sisters and brothers who are facing significant social pressure from outside the church. We can make this be felt more keenly through prayer and material support, particularly when the primary supporter of a family is jailed or removed when economic sanctions are being used as a means of coercion, and working through diplomacy for the end of religious persecution. We can be in touch with our sisters and brothers and ask the questions that will enable them, that will give them the opportunity to articulate and remember their own reasons for moving out of that former way of life and its associations, so as to support their own ongoing commitment to their former choice in the face of their neighbors or their government's bully.

And 1 Peter suggests that it might be valuable for us to become a voice that lets them know how valued they are by their sisters and brothers worldwide, how we

hold in esteem what they are willing to face because of the value of their faith to them, and seeking out other ways to affirm their dignity. In this way, we can act as the author of 1 Peter himself acted and hoped that other Christians would act toward one another. We can act in ways that will affirm the honor of our Christian sisters and brothers more loudly and more meaningfully than their neighbors seek to erode their honor.

This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament. This is session 2, Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Honor and Shame.