



PARAPHRASE OF MATTHEW 5 for HonorShame Contexts¹

(5:1-2) Setting

Upon seeing the crowds, he went up to the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

(5:3-12) The Honorable Ones.

I will now tell you to whom true honor really belongs.

Honorable *before God* are those who are shamed because they are socially impoverished and humiliated due to physical destituteness, because (*believe it or not!*) all the honorable blessings of God belong to them.

Honorable *before God* are those who are shamed because they mourn the complete loss of social standing and identity from losing their family for following Christ, because (*believe it or not!*) they will be comforted as they become a part of God's own family.

Honorable *before God* are the meek who are shamed because they disengage from false honor games by not revenging insult or injury when victimized, because (*believe or not!*) they are the ones who receive everything at the end of the day even though it seems like they are letting other people take everything from them.

Honorable *before God* are those who hunger and thirst for justice and vengeance in this world where the seemingly godless get the honor, because (*believe or not!*) they are the ones who will be satisfied.

Honorable *before God* are the merciful ones who are shamed since they foreswear their culturally-given rights to demand honor from others, because (*believe or not!*) they are the ones who will receive eschatological mercy from God.

Honorable *before God* are those with pure hearts that have not been defiled before God through cultural traditions that falsely promise purity and honor, because (*believe or not!*) they are the ones who will be worthy enough and clean enough to enter into God's very presence and see God.

Honorable *before God* are the peacemakers who forfeit any claim to honor when challenged by others, because (*believe it or not!*) they are the ones whose honorable status will be completely restored when they are called sons of God.

Honorable *before God* are those who are shamed as they are persecuted for the sake of remaining faithful to me in the face of cultural pressure (righteousness), since (*believe it or not!*) God's own kingdom belongs to such people.

¹ Such a paraphrase relies on Jerome Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: WJNP, 1998), esp. pp. 164-228. Words in italics are not in the original text, but do make explicit what original hearers would have implied because of their shared cultural context. This is intended to be expository in nature, not exegetical.

Honorable *before God* are you when you are completely shamed before your peers through reviling, banishment from the family and community, persecution, and false slandering on my account. *Despite this temporary shame*, rejoice and be glad since the heavenly reward *that vindicates your truth value* is great. The prophets before you were humiliated and ridiculed like you, *but we all know their honorable destiny*.

All the promises of vindication, honor, and greatness assured to those faithful to Torah now apply to those faithful to Jesus. If you follow my teaching, and not that of the would-be teachers, you will discover your true vocation and identity as the Yahweh's true people. Now, isn't that the life you want?!?

(5:13-16) God's Real People.

So you do you want to know who the true people of God are? It is those who follow my new code of conduct, not those who maintain Israel's identity markers. Israel failed to honor God when they excluded other nations from God's honor, so now they are being discarded and replaced.

You, you who follow me, and not Israel are the salt of the earth. But once salt has lost its flavor, do you think its saltiness can actually be restored? No! Since it is no longer of value, it is deemed worthless and rejected. Take heed, Israel was God's own people, but they now experience shame because they did not fulfill their original task of redeeming the world.

You, you who follow me, and not Israel are the light of the world. Now you know that a city on hill does not hide. Nor does anyone hide their light under a bushel, but they put it on a stand so it lights up the whole room. In that way, let your own light shine is such a radical way that people will immediately understand how great your Father is. Let there be no doubt as to what family you are really a part of, or how great the father of that family really is.

(5:17-20) Jesus' Teaching as the New Means of Faithfulness.

Don't misunderstand me. I have not come to say everything in the Law and the prophets is wrong and useless; rather, I want to interpret them so you can understand how honor can be really obtained as was the intention all along. There are a lot of false ideas about honor, but I came to set things straight for you. The law is going to be around until its purpose of establishing divine honor among all peoples is accomplished. There are a lot of people out there telling others what they need to do be pure and faithful before God, but anyone who thwarts God's code of honor and then leads others away from being faithful to God, this one is going to be the lowest, most shamed person in God's world. But whoever follows my new code of honor and teaches it to others, God is going to exalt and honor this one in his kingdom. I tell you honestly, you can and must follow my teaching to be faithful to God and considered honorable. Doing what the Pharisees do will not make you a faithful member of God's family, and you will for sure be excluded the kingdom of heaven. If you want be a part of the new group honored by God, you must follow me and my teaching. I'll give you six examples of how my code of honor contrasts with everything your culture and religion tell you.

(5:21-48) Jesus' New Code of Honor



(21-26) Even though you were told, ‘Don’t kill to revenge your honor; and whoever does will be judged,’ *I know how you guys try to get to around the letter of the law by establishing your identity through other forms of aggression like physical assault or verbal abuse. But the true honor I am offering is obtained through forsaking all these ridiculous cultural games. When somebody offends you or insults your honor, don’t even be angry in response or you will be judged. If you dishonor someone with and insult, you will be judged and eternally condemned to a state of disgrace ; if you say ‘You fool!’ , you will be judged by hell’s fire. Who cares what others may think because you do not ‘defend your honor’ as they think you should, God will ultimately debase such actions considered honorable. This is the ‘merciful one’ who will be honored. So, even if you are doing something so respectable as offering a gift at God’s alter and remember someone who you have dishonored, embarrassed, and thus offended, you must immediately leave your gift at the alter and make reconciliation by restoring the honor damaged or threatened, perhaps by presenting a gift to that person. It is that important that you disengage from the cultural games of accumulating honor at other’s expense. Or another example, if you are being taken to court because you have shamed someone, publically grant honor in a culturally appropriate manner (i.e., make friends) quickly so you don’t end up in prison. This is the ‘peacemaker’ that will be honored.*

(27-30) Even though you have heard ‘Don’t commit adultery,’ *I know the cultural rules you have created so you can accumulate honor through sexual conquest without technically breaking this command. Well, now I tell you, even if you happen to look at a woman lustfully, you have disgraced and defiled her as if you already committed adultery. Instead of offending others by defiling women and defiling yourself before God, it would be better if you pluck out your own right eye and throw it away when it is causing you to sin. I understand how ridiculously shameful and humiliating it would be to walk around without an eye, but losing one part of your body is far better than being separated from God’s community and being eternally covered with shame in hell.*

(31-32) You have heard, ‘You can divorce your wife if you give her an official certificate.’ *But you know that since marriage is a social agreement between the two families in your culture, that divorce is a major disgrace to your spouse and their entire family. How could you intentionally put someone in such a shameful social situation? Here is the new code of honor, if you dismiss your wife, you are making your own wife an adulterer, a fact that should be embarrassing to you since you are her husband in God’s eyes regardless of whatever culturally-justifiable certificate you hand her. You don’t want your wife sleeping with someone else, do you? And whoever marries a divorced woman, is disgracing himself before God and dishonoring the true husband because he is committing adultery. Obtaining honor through sexual conquest is proscribed.*

(33-37) You have also heard it said, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but you shall do for God what you have sworn.’ *But I say to you, don’t make any oaths, at all. Whether it be by heaven, earth, the city of Jerusalem, or by any another other thing associated with God, or even by your own head. When you make such verbose oaths before others to earn and defend your honorable reputation, it is all frivolous. Don’t posture before your neighbors in such dramatic ways, but just say ‘yes’ or ‘no’; anything else you add is from evil desires to save face or to get for false honor before peers.*



(38-42) *Obviously you have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, drop the entire concept of revenge in which you try to establish who your value when others challenge it, let them do evil to you. So what if someone shames you; you don't need to restore your damaged honor. If they insult you with a strike to the face, let them hit you again. If they sue you for your coat, give them your pants as well. If a powerful person wants to use you to establish his own image as a powerful person and drags you one mile, go a second mile with them. It is OK to be completely vulnerable and totally shamed, God will vindicate you. Give money to the beggar and borrower without worrying if they are using you or taking advantage of you, or if your charity won't lead to a noble reputation. When you interact with others, don't make your honor the goal of the interaction.*

(43-48) *So you already know your culture tells you, 'Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I will tell you what conduct is really honorable – love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. I know your culture rewards honors to those who maintain the group boundaries by helping insiders and harming outsiders. But don't worry if you are shamed for such disloyalty to group traditions, because if you do this, you will be people of supreme honor adopted into a superior family as a child of God. Any honor that you may lose in your village will be regained in heaven; I assure you this is true because God Himself also does good to the evil and unjust, as well as the good and just. He is the standard of honorable relations, so we should love all people regardless of our future honor rating like God does. If you love only the lovable insiders, what honor from God (i.e., reward) is there in that? Or if you only relate to your own family members, are you not just like the impure and shameful pagans? So, you must be perfectly honorable in your relations, just as the heavenly Father is always faithful and fair with everyone.*

Summary:

I will make it really clear, don't claim any honor for yourself (oaths), don't challenge the honor of anyone else (physical, verbal, or sexual aggression), immediately remove any honor challenges that you make (reconciliation, settling disagreements), and don't worry about defending your honor when others challenge it (no verbal retaliation, turn your cheek, and love your enemies). I know all of these lead to loss of honor and respect in the eyes of your peers, but they are honorable in the eyes of the one person whose opinion really counts – God. I am not teaching you to forswear all honor, but how to obtain real, eternal, divine honor. Honor is very important, that is why I am telling you about real, eternal honor.

Follow my teaching and you will be true Israel – God's real people. I know how bad Israel is oppressed and shamed by the Romans, but resist the temptation of taking cheap revenge to redeem your fallen status. Come after me, and your status as God's people will be renewed.

