

26.15

Honor and Shame in 1 Peter

First Peter tries to help its readers evaluate what is happening to them in light of the enormous weight placed on honor and shame in their culture. They have suffered terrible disgrace and a loss of status in a world that prizes social reputation above all else. Against this background, the author calls the readers to realize that they are actually in a position of much greater honor than they were before.

They have gone

- from living in darkness to living in marvelous light (2:9);
- from being “not a people” to being God’s people (2:10);
- from being ignorant (1:14) to being people who are obedient to the truth (1:22);
- from living in futility (1:18) to living in hope (1:3).

If their neighbors do not recognize this, it is because those neighbors lack the ability to determine what is truly honorable or shameful; they are ignorant and foolish people who do not know God (2:15; 4:3–4).

They are like the people who rejected Christ, the way foolish and incompetent builders would toss aside what they took to be a worthless rock without realizing it was actually the chief cornerstone (2:4–8).

With keen psychological insight, the author of 1 Peter discerns that the abusers are actually motivated by fear, and he urges his readers

not to be afraid of their fear (or, possibly, not to “fear what they fear,” as the NRSV has it; see 3:14).

Furthermore, the author can promise his readers that those who believe in Jesus “will not be put to shame” (2:6); indeed, the current experience of suffering may provide them with an opportunity to attain even greater honor before God when Jesus Christ is revealed (1:7).

See Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, SBLDS 160 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).