

## Shame and Restoration in Ezekiel

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### Abstract

There is a distinct difference between the modern individualistic concept of “guilt or innocent” in a person’s behaviour and repentance, and the biblical motif of shame and honour in the book of Ezekiel. The former seeks to excuse one’s behaviour and related consequences. The second seeks restoration of relationship by dealing with deeper heart issues, and obtaining a new moral self that will not repeat the harmful behaviour. This has implications for ministry today. We need to be aware of Ezekiel’s cycle of restoration to empower a deeper relationship with God, and with other humans. Restoration and healing can only happen when we acknowledge that our behaviour has caused shame to God and humans, and by taking back that shame we enable honour to come on the injured party, who can then share that honour with us.

### Keywords

Ezekiel – Shame – Honour – Moral Self – Restoration Cycle

### Introduction

Ministry in the Western context, be that concerning Divine-human or human-human relationships, is generally focused on legal aspects of determining guilt or innocence when offence is committed. In the typical Western evangelical-styled church, the common evangelistic invitation for salvation is for people to come and have one’s guilt for their sins removed, and the eternal death penalty for sins committed will also be erased. Many songs of the Evangelical era echo this mindset.<sup>1</sup> This guilt/penalty approach is also found in the ministry and counselling

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<sup>1</sup> A few examples of many; “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood” is where sinners “lose all their guilty stains.” Or “All that we were; Our sin, Our Guilt.” The old “Rock of Ages” cried out “Cleanse me from its [sin’s] guilt and power.” What can take away my sin? “Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” The focus of “There is Power in the Blood” was on removing the ‘burden of sin’. And “Free from Guilt and Free from Sin.” The classic ‘Just as I am’ says God “will receive, welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve.” The Gaither’s “He Touched Me” has the person shackled by a heavy burden “Neath a load of guilt and shame.”

spheres, where one's sins and wrongful behaviour is typically minimalised since they are informed grace and "the blood" covers all sins.

In guilt/innocent atonement-based societies the primary goal is for the guilty to be found without guilt and thereby declared "innocent." All this done at a clinical distance from God or other humans who have been sinned against. God is therefore implicitly, even explicitly at times, relegated to the role of legal "judge in the sky" who determines one's guilt or innocence from afar. There is rarely an evangelistic invite into a participatory atonement whereby the penitent is up close and personal with Christ's sacrifice, directly encountering their sins and resultant consequences, or the personal cost for Christ to atone one's sin. To the modern person, Christ's cross is usually at a clinical distance and thereby does not directly confront the penitent with a participating atonement act, whereby they identify with God on the cross, and take Christ's death and life as theirs as they communally join the people of God. That past act of Christ's cross serves to quickly remove one's guilt and penalty as a legal act based on the sinner's single point-in-time repeat-after-me-prayer. The "glory" is in the sinner accepting Jesus; little thought is given to any glory that God may receive, which is the focus in Ezekiel in which God's name and person is glorified in contrast to the profanity of humanity (Ezek.36:23; 39:7, 25).

Yet, there is now a growing awareness that the Bible has greater concern for matters of honour and shame in relational restoration. Jackson Wu<sup>2</sup> argues that Paul in Romans speaks more of honour and shame than guilt and penalty. The oft missing ingredient for transformation is a "fully restored relationship" with the offended party, and the development of a new moral self where past offenses are not repeated. Thus, under guilt/innocent paradigm it is possible to "join" Christianity and become a follower of Christ without true repentance or any deep identifying relationship with God. There is typically no invitation, other than the quick salvation prayer, for ministry or counselling to identify with the shame our actions have brought on God, or other offended human parties (including themselves), in our restoration. The emphasis is only upon removing our guilt and surface shame from that guilt; all wrong actions are swept neatly under the carpet of "grace."

With a shame-honour atonement-based society, one must intimately identify with the offended party. This requires understanding the events from *their* perspective and taking back *their* shame. This enables the penitent then to enjoy the joint honour that results from a restored relationship based on mutual understanding of consequences of the wrong previously done. Shame is a relational response to sin and wrong behaviour; guilt is a legal response. Taking back their shame

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<sup>2</sup> Wu, Jackson, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series; Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012).

from a party offended enables the wrongdoer to fully identify their actions and the previous unrecognised consequences inflicted upon the other person.

While there are a number of places in the Bible where honour and shame are included as part of God's restorative act, we will focus this paper on the book of Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup> The bearing and release of shame, and the re-gaining of honour, is part of the atonement and restoration of Divine-Human relationship within Ezekiel's priestly viewpoint. This perspective has received increasing interest among scholars as a recent number of studies have covered aspects of shame in Ezekiel. Ezekiel, and Paul later in Romans, is more concerned about rebuilding a relationship with the God of Israel rather than the removal of legal guilt and related penalties.

We will examine examples of shame and honour from Ezekiel, where the prophet declared the people's remembrance of their shame when "God atones for you" (Ezek.16:63). Later, when discussing the restoration of the Temple (Ezek.43-45), God declares the Levitical priests will bear "the shame of their abominations" (Ezek.44:13). Ezekiel highlights the way God acts to bring restoration, such as in the people's acceptance of God and giving him honour, highlights their shame by remembering their past actions. Only then can their sin be fully atoned, and only then can even they obtain God's honour in a restoration cycle. This restoration cycle needs to be realised even today. When restoring broken lives in our ministry activities, this occurs by the active work of the Holy Spirit (Ezek.11:19; 36:27). In this shame-restoration cycle Ezekiel embraces Wisdom Literature's focus towards practical living for daily life by causing us to focus today on shame and honour to bring lasting restoration in damaged relationships.

### **Ezekiel's Dilemma.**

Ezekiel is a righteous priest and prophet who faces three significant theological dilemmas—ones frequently faced in ministry and counselling today. The first dilemma is the people's accusation against God for seemingly abandoning his people, allowing the Babylonians to destroy God's city of Jerusalem and his Temple. How could permit the Babylonians to lead God's people into Exile (Ezek.8:12)? Included in this charge was the people's concern that their God was impotent in comparison to the Babylonian gods.

The second dilemma is the people's accusation of how God could allow the land to cast out God's people. How could God allow the land to expel them in a way that brought shame to Israel before the surrounding nations (Ezek.36:7, 15, 20)?

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<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Y. Wu's "Honor, Shame, and Guilt: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Book of Ezekiel" (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements 14; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

The third dilemma is the accusation of how God could allow his people to face the humiliation and shame of exile. God was supposed to be their covenant partner—their “Divine-Husband”—who should provide for, and protect them, from any enemy.

Many of those in in pastoral and/or counselling ministry often hear people blaming God and others for things gone wrong in their lives. Few initially want to self-identify with their own wrongful actions and consequences, and truly repent by acknowledging and identifying with the shame they brought to the other party, be that God or human.

In answer, Ezekiel provides God’s perspective—a perspective that the modern pastor, and counsellor may well learn from. Ezekiel points out that it is actually their God who has been abandoned and bore the real shame, while Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple, are all “shameless” over their sinful actions that generated their exile. The restoration of the leaders, city, and people will be found in a shame–honour restoration cycle wherein the people must first identify with the public shame their own actions brought on their God, and only as they are able to fully acknowledge their sin can they enter into full repentance and receive restoration.

### **1. Who Abandoned whom? Who is the ‘wronged’ partner?**

Ezekiel’s first task is to get the people to acknowledge who abandoned whom. In the same way, those doing pastoral ministry have to establish who is the “wronged” partner in relationship breakdowns with others and/or God. Only then can true restoration and reconciliation occur.

The omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, who overthrew the Egyptian superpower in the exodus to bring his people Israel to Sinai where they entered into a marriage covenant, is initially presented in Ezekiel as an impotent cuckolded husband whose wife has committed public adultery with a multitude of lovers (Ezek.16; 23). While Israel sees her exile as her shame, she is unrepentant for her actions of taking these other divine lovers. Odell says, “When [the LORD] was cuckolded instead, it is he who feels shame, not the adulterous wife Jerusalem. In fact, her shamelessness is part of the problem.”<sup>4</sup> This shamelessness needs to be overturned before full covenant restoration can take place.

Ezekiel’s theological answer is that restoration can now only happen “through embracing their identification with Oholah and Oholibah, whores and adulterers whose shame is theirs alone.”<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel provides God’s perspective that it was not he who abandoned his people, but his people

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<sup>4</sup> Odell, Margaret S., (2005). *Ezekiel*; (Symth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon GA: Symth & Helwys, 2005), 196

<sup>5</sup> Patton, Corinne. L., “Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore. A Response to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23” in Odell, M.S., & Strong, J.T., (eds.), *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*. (SBLSS 9; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000), 221-238.

who abandoned him by going after other gods, as other lovers. Their destruction was their own doing, and their shameless actions brought international shame and dishonour on their Covenant Husband.

Corrine Patton outlines how Ezekiel's outrageous account of the abused city being destroyed and raped is written with the intent of shocking Israel's leaders to realise *they* are the ones directly responsible for these events (Ezek.16; 23).<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel weaves the story so the leaders are first drawn in, and then shocked to realise the twist in the account is that "they [the leaders] are the whore and should be treated as one."<sup>7</sup> The leaders and people must face *God's* reality; their continued going after and sacrificing to other gods rather than their Divine Covenant Husband was their act of blatant whoredom (Ezek.16). Ezekiel has to bring the leaders and people to realise that their God is *not* impotent against other gods. Ezekiel's "Tough Love" challenge is that *they* are the reason why their nation, city, and Temple were destroyed and plundered. Their whorish actions must first be fully acknowledged before restoration can take place.

Too often in counselling people are focused on determining guilty and innocent parties, and most refuse to accept responsibility that their wrongful actions have brought shame upon another—it is all about "them" and why they did their wrongful actions. In restoration of family and community, there requires a full recognition of shame brought on the offended parties; yet in human relationships often each party can be both offender and offended, bringing a greater degree of complexity to restoration.

## 2. How Could God Allow Us to Lose Our Promised Land?

Israel's leaders and people claimed their expulsion from their land brought *them* shame before the nations (Ezek.36:20). But Ezekiel shows how the other covenant player in their Divine Marriage with their God, the land, as God's wedding gift to Israel (Torah was Israel's marriage Ketubah/Contract), was also shamed before the nations by their sinful betrayal of God in their worship of other gods in the high places (Ezek.6; 36:16). God declares his anger that the land of Israel was also shamed before the nations as a covenant partner (Ezek.36:6), and his anger is aimed at Israel's leaders who generated this exile, and also at the nations who cheered over the resultant exile.

The land reacts as God's covenant partner to the people's idolatry and whoring after other gods by vomiting God's people from God's Presence, just as Torah declared would take place

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<sup>6</sup> Patton, 238. Some scholars have brought out the terror of these texts; some even proposed these gave permission for spousal abuse, even rape and violence. But Patton provides a solid response to these, saying Ezekiel twists the imagery back on the male leaders – they are ones who committed the adultery that resulted in the rape and public humiliation of wives, mothers etc.

<sup>7</sup> Patton, "Should Our Sister be Treated Like a Whore?," 232.

(Lev.18:25; Ezek.36:16). The cause of their expulsion from their land is due to the leaders and people's adulterous actions, and not from God acting capriciously or impotently. *They* are the reason that they and their God were mocked by the nations as they left their land; *they* generated this shame to God and their land. God is essentially saying to the people: "I did this; I allowed this; because of your adulterous actions towards me (36:19-20). You defiled the mountains with your High Places (Ezek.6), and the land reacted as my covenant partner" (paraphrase mine). Ezekiel has to get the people and leaders to understand that their expulsion from the land ultimately brought shame on their God, "They profaned my holy name" (Ezek.36:20-21).

Ezekiel strongly challenges the leaders and people to transform from an unrepentant, shameless people, to acknowledge their past actions, and to understand the consequence for their breaking covenant with their Divine-Husband and land partner was their loss of God's land. If they are not going to act as God's Covenant Wife, then they forfeit their wedding gift of the land. Yet if Israel repents, the land will be restored to them.

Yet God treats their expulsion from the land as a miscarriage, not a final action, promising restoration and a future (Ezek.36:13-15). Part of their restoration is found in 36:12 of the early Greek (P967) "I will give birth to people on you", which restores the loss by miscarriage, and the promise that the land will "never miscarriage again." Part of Israel's restoration is the Lord announcing Israel's enemies will suffer their own shame that they sought to bring on the land (36:7). In her restoration as Covenant Partner, the land will have her shame removed and no longer miscarry God's people (36:15), nor again bring "famine" (36:30). Thus, the restoration of God's people includes God's land; a pastoral aspect that may encourage people towards a repentant heart, and shame-restoration cycle, realising their world and any resultant "loss"<sup>8</sup> may be repaired and rebuilt if full acknowledgement of their wrongful actions transpires.

### 3. Whose is the Shame?

Ezekiel's biggest theological challenge was to bring the people to their realisation that it was their God who suffered the greatest shame and dishonour, and not themselves, in the events leading up to, and of, the exile.

It is important in any restoration of relationship to determine the "wronged" partner. As Odell notes, "It is the one who is wronged, not the wrongdoer, who suffers shame."<sup>9</sup> Odell identifies a difference between guilt that one feels when they sin, and shame: "Shame differs from guilt, in

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<sup>8</sup> This loss may include property or personal identity.

<sup>9</sup> Odell, 196

that it is not the disloyal partner who experiences the shame, but the partner who is betrayed.”<sup>10</sup> The reputation and honour of the one wronged in the relationship breakdown is the one who suffers the shame and dishonour.

Frequently reconciliation counsellors deal with each person or party pointing their accusing fingers at the other. Ezekiel finds himself in a similar situation, standing in the gap between God and his people (Ezek.22:30). Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple priests, accuse God of not fulfilling his role as Divine husband, protecting and providing for them in a time of crisis. They claim they have been wronged, humiliated, and suffered the shame of divine abandonment before the nations; their Exile to Babylon is presented as evidence of God’s divine-spousal abandonment (Ezek.8:12; 9:9).

Ezekiel, as God’s prophetic priest, defends God’s honour, pointing out that God is the wronged and shamed covenant partner, dishonoured before the nations, not Israel or Jerusalem who committed “adultery” on her Divine Husband (Ezek.6, 16); the priests, leaders, and people, broke covenant, not God (Ezek.22). These may claim to be shamed before the nations, but they remain *shameless* over their actions that Ezekiel now highlights as causing the exile.

But Ezekiel declares God is ultimately the one who bears the dishonour and shame before the nations (Ezek.36:20-21). God’s broken-hearted anguish is heard in Ezek.6:9 “I was shattered/destroyed/smashed, by their adulterous heart which has departed from me.” On this, Odell says, “The idea that [the LORD] can be so deeply wounded by human actions is central to the notion of the covenant, and the accompanying effects of honor and shame further indicate [the LORD’s] attachment to Israel.”<sup>11</sup> The leaders and people must realise their painful actions and identify with God’s pain if they want to experience complete restoration. In the same way today, we must realise that our sinful actions have direct impact upon God; God is not unaffected and impartial to our behaviour, and nor are other humans, especially those closest to us, unaffected by our wrongful behaviour. Bechtel observes “to recognise that [the LORD] was vulnerable to shame is to bring a new dimension to the understanding of Old Testament thinking, which was diametrically opposed to twentieth-century, individual-orientated thinking.”<sup>12</sup>

Ezekiel seeks to remind people of what they did wrong; the first 24 chapters presents God’s view of Israel’s reality, reading as God’s victim-impact statement; this is done in graphic descriptions, especially in Ezek.16; 22; and 23. These chapters bear the cries of an angry betrayed covenant husband laying out charges of mass adultery. Yet the purpose is not to condemn Israel or Jerusalem, but to restore them, as found in the constant recognition formular “that they may/will

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<sup>10</sup> Odell, 82

<sup>11</sup> Odell, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Bechtel, Lyn. M., “The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel” in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Hopfe, L.N., (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 92.

know that I am the LORD” (found 55 times in Ezekiel). This restoration purpose is highlighted where “Nearly all the occurrences of loathing or shame in Ezekiel appear alongside covenantal language (16:59-62; 20:33-44; 36:22-32).”<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that these passages deal with relational themes of shame and honour, and not legal aspects of guilt and penalty. Guilt is only mentioned in Ezek.22:4, and in reference to the blood they shed, and in personal defilement of idols. Yet the context is to state that Israel is the party that has done the “wrong,” and then Ezekiel drills down into two main areas of “blood and idols.” Ezekiel is not focused on laying a legal guilty charge towards Israel; his goal is their restored covenant relationship by their repentance and acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

#### 4. Restoration Cycle by Shame and Dishonour

The Lord suffered shame by the actions of his Covenant people Israel, and now the Lord “vindicates his honor by shaming her.”<sup>14</sup> But this raises a problem for many Western people, how “on the anthropological side, the idea that forgiveness requires a sense of shame is offensive to many [people].”<sup>15</sup> But this sense of shame-restoration is obtained by Israel and Jerusalem remembering their past actions, recognising those actions were horrific to their Lord, and caused shame ultimately to come upon their God (Ezek.36:32). Israel must take responsibility for her past actions and receive the shame of the wronged partner back onto themselves who actually did the wrong, thus releasing honour onto the wronged partner (Ezek.16:61-63).

Lyn Bechtel<sup>16</sup> distinguishes that “shame is a ‘failure of self’ ... [whereas] guilt is a ‘failure of doing’.” Ellen Davis<sup>17</sup> states, “Shame is, if anything, an overwhelming sensation of dismay that the consequences of one’s conduct are inescapable” (especially for the offended party). Ezekiel seeks to get Israel’s leaders (and people) to remember their past conduct, and “this arriving at self-knowledge is equivalent to the acquisition of a new moral self, which is now capable of seeing [their] behavior as it really is, and consequently feeling ashamed.”<sup>18</sup> True repentance, restoration and reconciliation must result in a *new moral self*, whereby the repentant and restored person(s)

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<sup>13</sup> Odell, 82. The exceptions – Responses to military failure (32:24, 25, 30) or the shame of exile (34:29; 36:6) – may also be associated with the covenantal relationship” (Odell, 2005, 82).

<sup>14</sup> Odell, 198

<sup>15</sup> Odell, 199

<sup>16</sup> Bechtel, Lyn. M., “The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel,” 80.

<sup>17</sup> In Odell, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Lapsley, Jacqueline E., “Shame and Self Knowledge: The Positive Role of Shame in Ezekiel’s View of the Moral Self,” in *The Book of Ezekiel: theological and Anthropological Perspective*, eds. Odell, M.S., & Strong, J.T. (SBLSS 9; Atlanta: SBL, 2000) 144.



have the renewed ability of now making “accurate moral assessments” into their future, so past wrong behaviour will never be repeated.<sup>19</sup>

This quest for a new moral self is typically lacking in a guilt/penalty-based society. The difference is marked by Lapsley<sup>20</sup> who says, “shame perceives a total failure of self, whereas guilt focuses on the failure of specific actions; the latter not nearly so devastating to the self.” We may add that guilt-based cultures usually only acknowledge a specific wrong act when caught out. This approach does not display the sinful moral self behind the act, and the likelihood of repeating that act; the purpose is just to have guilt and resultant penalty and consequence removed.

Israel and Jerusalem’s restoration must include recognition of their past behaviour of covenant betrayal, cuckolding their Covenant Husband before the nations by their public plethora of lovers in idolatry that shamed their Lord. Their current exilic dilemma is the consequence of their own behaviour and covenant betrayal. The shame they brought on their Lord must now be taken back onto themselves, as they acknowledge their wrong (Ezek.36:32). Yet Israel initially refuses to accept their shame. Mudge pushes back on Lapsley’s view that Israel has an inability to feel shame, stating instead, based on Jer.3:3, that Israel’s “stubbornness implies an unwillingness to acknowledge shame.”<sup>21</sup> Sometimes, like Israel, we can be either stubborn or even have an inability to see the wrong we have done; this requires a direct intervention by Spirit of God to challenge our hearts. Mudge refers to this as “didactic shame,” rather than a hierarchical shame that comes from feeling lowly in someone’s presence; God uses “shame and honour” to teach his people Israel how to have a new level of obedience and relationship.

Paradoxically, “the very capacity to experience shame constitutes a salvific act by [the LORD] – it is a gift from God ... because it strips the people of their delusions about themselves.”<sup>22</sup> This gift of shame enables them to see their actions from God’s perspective, and is thus the primary part of repentance, without which full restoration cannot happen with either God or other human relationships. It is “only after [the LORD] has acted will the people ‘remember’ and ‘know’ [the LORD]” (Ezek.6:10).<sup>23</sup> Based on Ezek.16:53-54, Mudge says “[the LORD] will restore them in order that they bear their shame, that is, in order that they acknowledge their low status in their relationship with [the LORD]. Israel’s shame is linked to restoration.”<sup>24</sup>

The leaders and people accepting their shame will result in their own self-loathing and hating themselves for what they have done; as they will feel and wear the shame and dishonour that they brought on their Lord God (Ezek.6:9-10; 20:33-44). However, this will result in an increased

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<sup>19</sup> Lapsley, 156.

<sup>20</sup> Lapsley, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Mudge, Ronald, “Good Shame,” *Concordia Theological Journal*, 2:1 (Fall 2014): 47

<sup>22</sup> Lapsley, 159.

<sup>23</sup> Lapsley, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Mudge, 50.

knowledge of God's broken heart (Ezek.20:44), and Israel will realise how much her actions impacted God, albeit leading to her restoration.

In Ezekiel, Israel's Covenant God is shamed as her cuckolded husband, and now there are valid grounds for divorce, especially as God's shame is displayed before the nations. But God responds to Israel as a *Nidah*, a woman on her monthly cycle (Ezek.36:17), and treats her time in Babylon as a time set apart for ceremonial purity preparing for their relationship to return to fulness and normality. God will bring back his Covenant Wife as a renewed bride, after her *Nidah* time. The exile is therefore viewed by God not as the end of their covenant marriage, but as part of the restoration of their relationship. This restorative act of grace will enable the people to identify with their Covenant God, and cause their repentance, which includes their self-loathing as they recognise and take on the shame they brought upon their God. Their acknowledgement of shame, dishonour and repentance, will then make a way for God and his people to have their shame removed (34:29; 39:26; 43:10-12), and the honour now upon their God can then be imparted back onto them.

God's Holy name is honoured by his people accepting their shame that they did the wrong, not their God, and receiving the shame they put upon God for their actions, and this therefore vindicates their God in the sight of the nations, thus bringing him honour, and that honour is now transferred back onto his people (Ezek.34:39; 39:26; 43:10-12). God's restoration of his people is fulfilled with his removal of shame (36:8), as the people are washed clean (36:25), and given a new heart and spirit, or a new moral self (36:26-27). Now with their new moral self, they can have a new future, as a renewed Bride, with their Covenant Husband. This new spirit includes the active work of the Holy Spirit into the repentant moral self, empowering them to now walk in holiness before their Lord.

Ezekiel includes the restoration of their Temple as God's house as part of his restoration cycle challenge; in Ezekiel 16 and 43 he uses the language of cleansing and purifying the Temple with the priests. When discussing the restoration of the Temple (Ezek.43-45), God declares the Levites will bear "the shame of their abominations" (Ezek.44:13). Zimmerli argues that this shame is a form of punishment on the Levitical priesthood; yet a closer examination reveals the shame is part of their restoration.<sup>25</sup> Ortlund says "the bearing of iniquity by the Levites (vv. 10, 12) is to be understood in essentially the same terms as the bearing of disgrace (v. 13): they are bearing their sin and disgrace in the very fact of their restoration to service."<sup>26</sup> The Levites who were an active part of bringing shame on God must fully acknowledge their wrongdoing, and then take back the

<sup>25</sup> Zimmerli, Walter, *Ezekiel 2: A commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 452f.

<sup>26</sup> Ortlund, Eric N., *Shame and Restoration: An Exegetical Exploration of Shame in Ezekiel's Restoration Prophecies* (M.A. thesis, Trinity International University, 2003), 5.

international shame their wrongful actions brought upon their God that they were supposed to make atonement towards. Only then can the Levites be restored back into their ministerial office. There can be no restoration of true worship without first restoration of relationship. This is fitting for Jerusalem as God's bride; the Temple is God's house and bridal and dwelling Place. This action is required today with the plethora of fallen ministries. In the same way the people were forced to confront what they had lost in the remeasuring of the Temple. Peterson points out the "command to the people to 'measure' (*mdd*) the temple plan with the intent of "shaming" (*clm*) those who study it (cf. also Ezek. 7:18; 34:29; 39:26; and 16:59-63)."<sup>27</sup>

This is Ezekiel's sin-shame-restoration cycle—it is up close and personal—and not at a clinical legal "guilt-innocent" distance that does not directly impact the people; this shame-restoration cycle builds and/or deepens relationships formed in the trenches of daily life.

### 5. Shame and Honour today

Today, accepting shame is typically ignored in counselling and ministry, that often follows a 'it doesn't matter, God loves you and removes your guilt;' an offer of ultra grace where deep repentance is not fully required for reconciliation between God and others. There is little or nothing in the modern evangelist's or counsellor's call for the sinner to accept these biblical concepts found in Ezekiel of receiving shame for their past actions, either personal, or identifying shame with Jesus' atoning for their sin. Nor is there any identification with the shame brought upon others in human conflicts or community breakdowns. The typical message contains the avoidance of shame as one is freed from their guilt and declared innocent from any penalty by God or humans. Likewise, there is an absence of identifying with the emotional impact and/or shame that God has borne by atoning for our sin. God is implicitly presented as the Unmoved One, largely untouched and unaffected by our sin; Christ is on a distant cross just removing our guilt and penalty for our sin: it is atonement without personal encounter.

The major problem resulting from atonement without encounter, removing guilt and the resulting penalty as a legal type action, is that there is little basis for intimate relationship with God, and no motivation or power to transform into a new moral-self before God and others.<sup>28</sup> As Ortlund notes "Without such shame, [the LORD] cannot fully be known in that intimate and profound way which the recognition formula is meant to designate .... Without shame [the LORD]

<sup>27</sup> Peterson, B., 'Ezekiel's Rhetoric: Ancient Near Eastern Building Protocol and Shame and Honor as the Keys in Identifying the Builder of the Eschatological Temple' *JETS* 56:4 (2013): 727.

<sup>28</sup> Just as I once stood in a court room, awaiting my sentence for a motorcycle traffic violation, there was no concept of having any relationship with the magistrate, regardless of his decision, so then the evangelist or counsellor's call is just to have the heavenly Judge remove one's guilt, sin and penalty.

is not truly known.”<sup>29</sup> Developing an intimate relationship with a loving God, a God who loved us so much that he died in our place, is rarely part of the evangelist’s “legal” invite; there is little call to enter a relationship that will transform the moral-self back into the image of God (as in Gen.1:26). Being found “innocent” rather than “guilty” does not result a “new moral self”—but shame does carry the opportunity and incentive to change one’s ways, and enter into a new moral self. Likewise, there is little recognition with guilt/innocent paradigm that deep transformation takes time; the instant “add Jesus and stir” type invite of just putting up one’s hand in a service does not instantly transform the heart.<sup>30</sup>

By stepping into a tough love confrontation like Ezekiel we may encourage those seeking the Lord to fully and completely acknowledge their wrongful behaviour, and take on all the shame and dishonour that their hearts, not just their actions, have grieved God. Only then can true repentance take place; then and only then can we identify with Christ both on the cross, and as the resurrected Messiah. Then God accepts our new identity in Christ, embracing us and welcoming us into his people, his family, to share in his glory and honour, and the Holy Spirit can fully empower us to live God out into our world in a way that honours him with our new moral self. This moves away from the Western individualism of a guilt/penalty legal framework, to a more biblical “shame-honour” framework.<sup>31</sup>

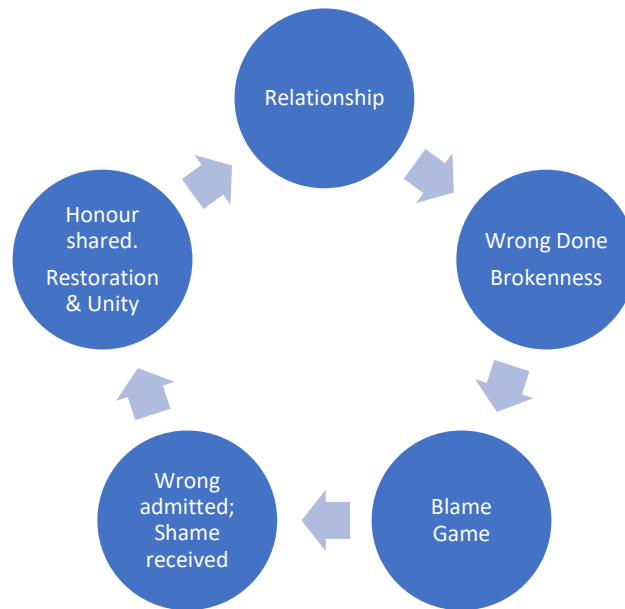
This Shame-Honour Restoration cycle can also be applied in counselling where often the conflict resolution starts with each giving blame to the other for their wrongful actions, and no one identifying with the shame given to the other. Restoration only takes place when each recognises the hurt and harm from the other person’s perspective. Restoration occurs when the person doing the wrong acknowledges the shame given to the other party, and then taking that shame onto themselves, thus gifting honour to the previously shamed party, who is then able to share that honour back with the wrongdoer. Often this is an action done mutually as each acknowledges their wrong. We can note this Restoration Cycle in the following drawing:

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<sup>29</sup> Ortlund, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Scott McKnight (2010) does a great critique of this ‘single moment decision’ evangelism in his *One Life*; his life challenge occurred at Bible College, asking himself ‘Do I really *know* Jesus, or just Christianity?’

<sup>31</sup> The evangelist declaring everyone’s sin is automatically under grace, and that without full repentance, is against Ezekiel’s message that shame-dishonour can enable the person to fully partake of God’s shame by self-identification, and which then generates a change in one’s moral self and character, generating again an identity with God’s name being known in a positive sense for the change in their world.



## Conclusion

Ezekiel's viewpoint that includes God's restoration, and the restoration of family and community relationships, has a component that recognises shame for past behaviour that has not honoured God and/or others. Ezekiel's viewpoint is a cycle of shame-honour-restoration that recognises the one wronged, and the shame they wear. Then the wrongdoer repents and takes back the shame onto themselves, leaving the injured party with new honour. Full restoration can occur as that honour can be shared back to the repentant heart, who now should have a new moral self. One must embrace their wrongdoing in order for the cycle of restoration to be complete. Shame, rather than guilt and penalty, can have a healthy function and should be considered in the modern church and family, in preaching and counselling towards restoration of damaged relationships.

We find Israel's Restoration Cycle is promised wherein Israel's ruined places will be rebuilt, and they will be as Eden again, and festivals resumed (Ezek.36:33-38). Israel's "dry bones" will be raised back to life (Ezek.37:1-14), and their divided nation will be united under a Davidic Leader (Ezek.37:15-28). Israel's enemies will be defeated (Ezek.38-39). Then God's house will be rebuilt, and the Levitical worship will be restored, and God will "be there" (Ezek.40-48).

We may encourage others that Ezekiel's Shame and Honour Restoration Cycle empowers not just a new moral self, but also empowers a new life that will be fruitful and multiplying in relationship with God and others. This Shame-Honour Restoration cycle needs to be realised when restoring broken families and communities, and our relationship with God.

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