

# HONOR AND SHAME: A WESTERN PRIMER

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Your world view and the Muslim's next door are vastly different. Maybe you already know that but just don't understand it. This primer will give you a simple overview of what world view is, how yours and theirs is different, and what this means to Gospel witness and faith conversations in the public square with Muslims.

Just a little understanding of world view can go a very long way in building relationships cross-culturally. In particular, understanding the Honor and Shame world view of Muslims can make all the difference in our starting point with the Gospel.

## What is World View?

Paul Hiebert, missiological anthropologist and author, defined world view as *the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture.*

## How Is My World View Different From My Muslim Friend?

**If you are a Westerner, the assumptions you make about reality, your world view, is shaped by the tenets of guilt or innocence, right or wrong.**

Therefore, your behavior and beliefs are primarily influenced by these concepts. For example, in the American justice system, a person accused of a crime is given the benefit of a trial where evidence is brought before a jury to determine guilt or innocence. The accused is considered innocent until proven guilty.

In Western societies, the law ultimately determines if behavior is right or wrong. People speak casually of things being "right for me" or wrong for me," political candidates are judged on the basis of being "the right or the

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wrong person for the job,” and instant replays in rowdy sports competitions must have the final say in whether a referee’s call was ultimately right or wrong.

**The Islamic world view, on the other hand, is founded on the principles of honor and shame.**

Therefore, the behavior and beliefs of Muslims are primarily shaped by the concepts of honor and shame. One Arabic proverb says, “A sin committed in secret is half-forgiven.” The rightness or wrongness of one’s action is less important than if it was done without bringing dishonor to the person, his family, and his community.

Sports teams from honor-shame cultures have been known to curb their scoring to avoid bringing shame on the opposing team through a large margin of defeat.

If you are from an Islamic world view, honor and shame are more important than anything else. Honor and shame are actual positions in society, always attached to a group. Everything you do either brings honor or shame to the group to which you belong. That group could be your family, your community, tribe, or nation.

One is either an insider, following the rules of society, in a position of honor, or one is an outsider, having broken some rule of society, in a position of shame. Honor is not just bestowed upon the talented, the high-achievers. Honor is a position maintained by adherence to the rules of a collectivist society. Shame is not merely an undesirable feeling, it can and often does result in expulsion from the group.

## **How Does an Understanding of the Honor-Shame World View Impact My Gospel Witness?**

**Both the Western world view of guilt and innocence and the Islamic world view of honor and shame are, at the core, a struggle to overcome sin.**

Westerners are keenly sensitive to wrongdoing and the need to make things right. A Gospel witness that emphasizes repentance, forgiveness of

sin, and redemption is a relief to the Western soul longing to walk innocently before God, restored to relationship with Him.

The good news for those from the Islamic world view of honor and shame is that the Gospel does not merely make the guilty innocent, it also restores the shamed outsider to honored insider before God. Through the Messiah, our sins are forgiven and the shame that separates us is abolished. We are honored by God and nothing can snatch us out of His hand. We can't work our way into a position of honor with God; it has been achieved by the Messiah for us through His death and resurrection.

Our starting point in Gospel witness to Muslims can make a big difference. Opening the faith conversation with Jesus' abolishment of our shame and establishment of our position of honor before God is a narrative your Muslim friend will understand and want to know more about.



For more on world view, download my free resource *World View for Dummies* on [www.audreyfrank.com](http://www.audreyfrank.com)

## Further Resources:

- *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* by Roland Muller (Xlibris, 2001)
- *Covered Glory: The Face of Honor and Shame in the Muslim World* by Audrey Frank (Harvest House, 2019)
- *The 3D Gospel*, by Jayspon Georges (Tim& 275 Press, 2014)
- *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures* by Georges and Baker (2016, IVP)
- *The Global Gospel*, by Werner Mischke (2015)