



## The Culture Behind the Bible

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### Pop Quiz: Ripped from the Headlines!

#### The Case of Ahmed Mohamed

Some reports indicate he was "not very forthcoming" when asked about his clock. Assuming this is true, what possible cultural reason might lie behind this behavior?

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### Applying a Cultural Lens to Scriptural Interpretation:

From Proverbs 31:10-31 (Last Sunday's First Lesson)

"Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates."  
Prov 31:31

What is unusual here in terms of last week's discussion on honor/shame and the role of women?

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### Relationships in AMC: The Family

- The family is the basic unit - no surprise here, but for different reasons than ours.
- Maintenance of ascribed honor, increase of acquired honor are central.
- Family is connected not only by blood but by their common honor interests.
- Trust is only extended to those whose interests are intertwined with yours.

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### The Family, con't

- It is a patriarchal culture. Everything, including wives and children are considered the property of the man to whom they belong.
- When a woman marries, she is now regarded as part of her husband's family. No longer a part of her birth family.
- A wife or concubine is not a member of the family, and certainly not trusted until she produces a son. However, if married to a close cousin, neither this nor the previous point applies.
- All members of a family are secondary to the family's interests, and can be sacrificed to them.
- A wife's strongest ally in the family are her sons, particularly the oldest.
- A sister's strongest ally are her brothers, particularly the oldest.

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### Example: The Family and Honor

- Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen 19:1-28  
 "But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please: only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.'" (4-8)
- What is at issue here? Are Lot's actions culturally acceptable? Does this story have anything to do with homosexuality per se?

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### Example: The Mother/Son Relationship

- Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Gen 27:1-45  
 "Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, '...Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; and you shall take it to your father to eat so that he may bless you before he dies.'" (5-10)
- Recall that Esau is (barely) older than Jacob. Are Rebekah's actions culturally acceptable?

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### Contemporary Examples:

- Michael and Fredo Corleone:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Wweop\\_atTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Wweop_atTg)
- Michael's Confession:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2QiuZpmoo>
- Honor killings:
  - The father punishes the daughter; the brothers seek revenge.

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### Example: God Acts Beyond Cultural Expectations

- Genealogy of Jesus Christ: Matthew 1:1-17.
- Five scandals:
  - Tamar and Judah: After her husband dies, Judah, her father-in-law fails to marry her to one of his brothers, so that her husband's name is memorialized, she poses as a prostitute, and has relations with her father-in-law. (Gen 38:1-26)
  - Rahab: a Gentile prostitute in Jericho. She saved the lives of two spies sent by Joshua to assess enemy forces. (Joshua 2:1-21)
  - Ruth: a Moabite. She was not to associate with Israelites.
  - The wife of Uriah = Bathsheba. David has Uriah killed to obtain her. (2 Sam 11:1-27)
  - Mary: unwed mother. (Matthew and Luke)

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### Clan Relationships

- Clan = extended family.
- Interclan relationships can be trusted only insofar as interests are interlocked.
- Otherwise, relationships are tinged with suspicion.
- Ex: Jacob and Uncle Laban (Gen 29:15-30, 30:25-31:21). Relations start out well, but end badly due to jealousy.

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### Relationships Between Equals

- Balance, reciprocity are key. Honor considerations are always paramount. A lot of "after you, no, after you" politeness.
- Any sort of indebtedness or inequality must be avoided, lest honor be lost.
- Hospitality is an imperative.
- The foreigner/stranger must be watched, and avoided if possible.
- The strange/foreign woman is a symbol of disorder, chaos, and the upset of divine order. (Prov 5:1-14)

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### Relationships Between Unequals: The Patron-Client Relationship

- A reciprocal relationship between social unequals.
- Lower status person (client) has his needs met by an upper status person (patron).
- When a favor is granted, there is an implicit promise to pay back the patron, whenever and however the patron asks.
- The patron implicitly promises to be open to further requests from the client.
- The patron takes on the role of an older, more powerful kinsman who sees to the needs of the client as if he were a dependent.
- Ideally a client has only one lifelong patron to whom is owed lifelong loyalty.
- Sometimes patron/client relationships include a broker, who brings client or patron together for mutual benefit. Brokers control access to a highly placed patron.
- Different from friendship. Friends help each other because something other than an agreement binds them together.
- Patrons are not friends: they must be cultivated. However clients often refer to patrons as "friends" because it brings them greater honor.

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The Patron-Client Relationship:  
An example of relationship broken and restored

The opening scene of the Godfather:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV5QdX\\_oW4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV5QdX_oW4)

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The Patron-Client Relationship:  
God and Humans

- Since God is above all, the relationship with God is necessarily a patron-client relationship.
- In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Covenant on Sinai spells out the terms of this relationship.

Loyalty and exclusivity are the glue that holds this relationship together:  
 "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD."  
 - Ex 6:7-8  
 "You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God am a jealous God..."  
 - Ex 20:4-5

- In the Christian Scriptures, the language of grace is the language of patronage. God, the ultimate patron, bestows his good in the form of grace.

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The Patron-Client Relationship:  
Jesus

- Jesus is both a broker and patron.
- Jesus brokers God's grace. He speaks with authority, and channels God's forgiveness and healing.
- Jesus' relationship with his apostles is that of patron/client. Jesus gives them unique access to God (the "secret teachings" of Mark) and takes care of them; they gain honor with their association with him. Absolute loyalty is their obligation.
- Anyone who comes to Jesus asking for healing asks as a supplicant to a broker. Once the request is granted, the supplicant is obligated to sing Jesus' praises to one and all. (The injunction to silence particularly noticeable in Mark is culturally divergent.)

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Jesus:

The Refashioning of Honor/Shame; Familial and Patron/Client Relationship

The glue of relationship with God is not cultural convention, but love.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." - Luke 11:5-7.

"Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'" - Mark 3:31-35

"But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." - Luke 6:27-28, 32

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Jesus:

Using the Patron/Client Relationship as Teachable Moment

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed 500 denarii, and the other 50. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.'... Therefore, I tell you, [the sinful woman's] sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." - Luke 7:36-5

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Next Week:

Honor/Shame and Morality in AMC.

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