



Social – scientific interpretation of the Parable of the Widow and the unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8) from honour/ shame perspective

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ABSTRACT

The parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8) can be interpreted through a social-scientific lens, particularly from an honour/shame perspective in the context of ancient societies. In this narrative, the persistent widow represents those marginalized by societal structures, challenging the unjust authority of the judge who initially dismisses her pleas. From an honour/shame viewpoint, the widow’s relentless pursuit of justice can be seen as a reclamation of her dignity and social standing, as she defies the norms that typically silence the vulnerable. The judge, embodying the archetype of a powerful figure, ultimately succumbs to her demands not out of compassion but to avoid public shame. Thus, the parable not only underscores the importance of prayer or perseverance in seeking justice but also reflects the broader social implications of honour and shame.

Keywords: Parables, Akan, Luke 18:1-8, honour/shame, social-scientific

INTRODUCTION¹

The parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1–8 presents readers with captivating content of the scenes. The main parable (18:2–5) in 18:1–8 is not a standalone story but a narrative intricately woven within a frame of prayer (18:1) and issues of faith and the coming of the Son of Man (18:6–8). The narrative frame opens the parable to diverse interpretations.² This makes the parable unique because it generates several themes. Notable among these themes and analyses from scholars include prayer (faithfulness and

¹ This article represents a reworked version of aspects from PhD-thesis of Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Junior, titled The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8): An Akan and Social-Scientific Reading, in the Department of New Testament and Related Literature, University of Pretoria, with Prof. Dr. Ernest van Eck as supervisor.

² Critical perspectives regarding the origins and unity of the parable vary considerably. Typically, three positions are recognized, and Arland Hultgren has conducted extensive research on this topic. Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 257.

persistent prayer),³ gender (feminist interpretation)⁴ justice/injustice⁵ and metaphor of the Kingdom.⁶

However, many interpretations overlook the crucial sociological context of the first-century world where the parable was told. In addition, most analysis from the sociological perspective do not pay much attention to how the honour and shame model can help interpret this parable. The research focus of this study suggests that overlooking the sociocultural dynamics of honour and shame when analyzing the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1–8 would result in missing significant aspects of the narrative that deeply resonated with its initial audience.

The research focus stems from the fact that the parable has so many features of honour and shame. For example, the parable is traditionally known as the parable of the unjust judge. The word Unjust also means dishonourable and is an honour and shame term. The research reveals another interpretation gap in that many scholars mention the concept of honour and shame in the parable, particularly about the unjust judge's actions towards the widow. For example, Arland Hultgren, referencing Walter Grundmann, opines that the word translated as lose act, grow weary or faint has an etymological word ἔγκακεῖν, which means "to act badly" and later came to mean to grow weary.⁷ To act badly means to show dishonourable behaviour, which resonates with honour and shame.

Again, Bernard Brandon Scott, from the perspective of the metaphor of the kingdom, suggested that the "kingdom keeps coming, keeps battering down regardless of honour or justice, and may even come under the guise of shamelessness (lack of honour)."⁸ Similarly, William Herzog, from the perspective of justice, asserts that "the widow refuses to be silent and the result of her shameless behaviour is a just verdict."⁹

The views of Scott, Herzog, and Hultgren validate that the parable is not only about the theme of prayer, justice, gender, and the Kingdom metaphors, but also a deep sense of sociological implications when analyzed through the lens of the first-century Mediterranean society values: honour and shame, which will be demonstrated further in this paper. The above assertions also show the presence of honour/shame in these narratives and how the sociological context influences the parable, highlighting a gap in its interpretation. This paper, therefore, proposes that the parable can be better understood and more comprehensively grasped by adopting a fresh perspective and orientation using the honour and shame model.

This study will present themes in the following pages to support this assertion. First, it will conduct a sociological survey on the parable's interpretation, looking at how scholars have used the sociological approach to study the parable under investigation. The second aspect will discuss the methodological approach for this study. A study of the honour and shame model using a sociological approach will be carried out here. The third aspect will then offer an analysis of the passage (18:1–8) using the methodology explained. The analysis will be done in two phases: first is the analysis of the main parable (18:2–5), and second is the analysis of the interpretative frame (18:1, 6–8). This aspect will also briefly synchronize the

³ Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 252–62; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1176–77; Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 207–11; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary. NTL* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2012), 334–57; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 638; David E. Garland, *Luke, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 705–14.

⁴ Wendy Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow and the Threatened Judge (Luke 18.1–8)," *NTS* 51 (2005): 328–43; Barbara E. Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice: Luke 18: 1-8," *Biblical Research* 45 (2000): 25–33; Barbara Reid, "Beyond Petty Pursuits and Wearisome Widows: Three Lukan Parables," *Interpretation* 56 (2002): 284–94; Spencer, F. Scott, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁵ Herman Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); William R. Herzog, *The Parable as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011); Stephen Curkpatrick, "Dissonance in Luke 18:1–8," *JBL* 121 (2002): 107–21. For instance, Curkpatrick argues that the framing of verses 18:2-5 is inappropriate and suggests that they align more appropriately with the theme of justice.

⁶ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014); Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). These scholars also address the idea of eschatology.

⁷ Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 252.

⁸ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 187.

⁹ Herzog, *The Parable as Subversive Speech*, 232.

honour and shame model with other themes scholars have used in interpreting the parable. Here, the study will show how honour and shame can help one understand the various themes applied to the parable.

Sociological Survey on the Interpretation of Luke 18:1–8.

Social-Scientific Criticism (SSC) of the Bible, which is mostly called a sociological approach/method, is defined by John Elliott as “that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences.”¹⁰ Elliott further opines that “Biblical exegesis in the last third of the 20th century has been marked by a growing awareness that the social and cultural contexts of texts and traditions, referred to by historical critics as the *Sitz im Leben*, needed more refined analysis and articulation.”¹¹ Therefore, as a methodology, SSC contextualizes the NT texts within the socio-cultural milieu of the first-century world.

So far, gender construction has dominated the phase of the sociological model used in interpreting the parable of 18:1–8 parable.¹² One proponent of the gender construction of the parable is Barbara Reid, who uses several gender approaches to address the parable in 18:1–8.¹³ F. Scott Spencer also prefers a feminist reading of the parable and argues that “this parable represents a *locus classicus* for constructive feminist-theological biblical interpretation.”¹⁴ However, it is essential to be mindful of the potential pitfalls of overanalyzing the parable through a feminist-gender model. While this model is prevalent in contemporary sociological approaches, it can sometimes detract from the practical interpretation of the texts within their first-century original historical context.

Marianne Bjelland Kartzow also analyzes the parable from the perspective of rewritten scripture and cultural echo. Kartzow's view is that the parable is best understood when interpreted through rewritten stereotypes using a cultural echo of gossip and how it relates to gender in the ancient world.¹⁵ Kartzow uses Sirach 35:14–25 as the baseline of the written text. In using this method, how the honour and shame motif applies to the interpretative frame is not well sketched out because the parable analysis centers mainly on 18:2–5.

There is also a study on the social deviant aspect of the parable. In this context, the portrayal of the widow in Luke 18:1–8 shares specific characteristics with the social deviancy theory. This is especially the case within an honour and shame culture where women are typically not encouraged to be assertive.¹⁶ The deviation arises from the widow's actions of venturing into the public sphere in a society where women were traditionally confined to private spaces.¹⁷ Clement Matarirano analyzes the parable using such deviant aspects of socio-cultural values. He argues that “the widow's action is deviant; some interpreters do not take into account the cultural context from which the story is told, ignoring the fact that she lived in a community bound by the honour and shame culture.”¹⁸ Matarirano's view ignores the fact that the judge also demonstrates deviant behavior by not paying attention to the widow during her early state of the request. This does not imply that the study concurs with the widow's deviant behaviour—if there is any.

The study reveals two proponents who make some significant contributions regarding interpreting the parable in Luke 18:1–8 from the honour and shame perspective they are Kenneth E. Bailey and Bernard

¹⁰ John H. Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 7.

¹¹ John H. Elliott, “Social-Scientific Criticism: Perspective, Process and Payoff. Evil Eye Accusation at Galatia as Illustration of the Method,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 1–10.

¹² Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 264; Cotter, “The Parable of the Feisty Widow,” 341.

¹³ Reid, “A Godly widow Persistently Pursuing Justice,” 25–33; “Beyond Petty Pursuits and Wearisome Widows,” 284–94.

¹⁴ Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 264.

¹⁵ Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, “Rewritten Stereotypes: Scripture and Cultural Echo in Luke's Parable of the Widow and the Judge,” in *Luke's Literary Creativity*, ed. Mogens Muller and Jesper Tang Nielsen (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 217.

¹⁶ Clement Matarirano, “Talking Back to Power: Deviance in Luke 18:1–8 and Women in Zimbabwe” Ph.D. diss (University of Pretoria, 2019).12.

¹⁷ Matarirano, “Talking back to power,” 12.

¹⁸ Matarirano, “Talking back to power,” 12.

Brandon Scott.¹⁹ Bailey analyzes the parable from a Middle Eastern perspective, while Scott looks at the parable from a justice perspective. These two scholars, though, do not directly apply honour and shame to the parable, yet their interpretation makes use of characteristics associated with honour and shame and makes regular use of them. Their work serves as a foundation to build our periscope.

Sensitivity to culture is a positive contribution to Bailey's and Scott's work. Although Bailey analyses the parable from a Middle-Eastern perspective, he seldom makes remarks on the honour and shame model. Scott makes considerable observations of honour and shame in interpreting the parable, but does not link them to the interpretative frame of 18:1, 6–8; yet his conclusion is remarkable as he opines that “the kingdom keeps coming, keeps battering down regardless of honour or justice. It may even come under the guise of shamelessness (lack of honour).”²⁰ Scott may be allegorically referring to the widow as the kingdom of God. However, his conclusion suggests that the main parable (18:2–5) can be applied to the surrounding verses (18:1, 6–8) when interpreted from honour and shame. Scott's conclusion calls for further studies on how the parable can be analyzed from the honour and shame perspective and how that perspective will reflect on the interpretative frame (18:1, 6–8) of the parable and, to an extent, the larger frame. The next section will, therefore, look at honour and shame as a model.

Honour and Shame Model as a Sociological Approach.

Notions of honour and shame are present in most cultures.²¹ The societal framework of the first-century world revolved around the fundamental social principles of honour and shame,²² called the “pivotal values of the first-century Mediterranean world.”²³ David A. deSilva calls for learning “the language of honour and dishonour in the first-century Greco-Roman world, which includes the Jewish subculture.”²⁴ These words are:

“Glory or reputation, honour, and praise, together with their related verbal and adjectival forms. Their antonyms, dishonour, reproach, scorn, slander, and blasphemy, together with the adjectives and verbs, are derived from these roots. Such word searches provide a starting place to “hook into” the texts as first-century Christians would have. These words have other concepts and terms that would resonate directly with considerations of honour and shame.”²⁵

In addition, some other typical meanings of honour found in dictionaries include “the price or value of something, respect paid to someone, honorary office, dignity and status, and honour or awards given to someone.”²⁶ Therefore, honour can be defined from individual and social aspects as “the positive value of a person in his or her own eyes plus the positive appreciation of that person in the eyes of his or her social group.”²⁷ Again, honour is “the socially approved and expected attitudes and behaviour in the areas where power, sexual status, and religion intersect. It is the public claim to worth and status along with the social acknowledgement of such worth, status and reputation.”²⁸ To elucidate the hierarchical nature of honour in social structures, “honour is the apex of the pyramid of temporal social values and conditions their

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* in *Poet & Peasant; and, Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke, Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).261-68.

²⁰ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 187.

²¹ Halvor Moxnes, “Honour and Shame,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishers, 1996).19.

²² David A DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (InterVarsity Press, 2022).11.

²³ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

²⁴ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 17.

²⁵ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 17.

²⁶ Elizabeth Mahlangu, “The Ancient Mediterranean Values of Honour and Shame as a Hermeneutical Procedure: A Social-Scientific Criticism in an African Perspective,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 22 (2001): 85–101.

²⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H Neyrey, “Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 1991).25.

²⁸ Elliot, *What is social-scientific criticism*, 130.

hierarchical order. Cutting across all other social classifications, it divides social beings into two fundamental categories, those endowed with honour and those deprived of it."²⁹

Moxnes adds, "Honour is fundamentally the public recognition of one's social standing."³⁰ Honour is also "a token of a reputation for doing good."³¹ To affirm these, Richard L. Rohrbaugh makes references that "in the Judean world, Philo often speaks of honour as; the glory, fame, high reputations, being adorned with honours and public offices, noble birth, the desire for glory, honour in the present, and a good name for the future (*De migratione Abrahami* 172; *Legum allegoriae* 3.87; *Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat* 33, 157; *De posteritate Caini* 112; *De Abrahamo* 185, 263)."³² Honour, then, "is a claim of worth and the social acknowledgement of that worth."³³

Honour has two facets; first, honour can be attributed, ascribed,³⁴ or symbolled by blood.³⁵ This type of honour is gained through birth because of genealogy. Secondly, "honour can be achieved based on a person's moral character, actions, or performance,"³⁶ thus, honour is symbolled by name.³⁷ This second form of "honour can be won and lost in challenge and reciprocity."³⁸ Gender constructions also characterize honour and shame, and so gender roles influence conceptions of honourable behaviour. Men generally occupied public places, and women were directed towards the private spaces of home and hearth.³⁹ The male gender is, therefore, seen as honourable, and the female gender is seen as shameful (lack of honour).

Shame can mainly be described as the reversal of the honour one has.⁴⁰ If honour is a coin, shame is the flip side. Based on this concise exploration of honour and shame, we will proceed to analyze the parable using this honour and shame model.

Analyzing the Parable Through Honour/Shame Model: The Main Parable (18:2–5)

This section will first analyze the main parable (18:2–5) with a word study on ὑποπίστι (18:4–5) and then relate the parable to its interpretive frame (18:1, 6–8).

In the main parable, Luke (18:2) introduces the first character, who happens to be a judge. The narrator's description of the judge is an oxymoron because his character contradicts his calling. However, the judge's identity can be seen from both an honour and a shame perspective. The shame relates to his attitude as one who does not fear God nor regard humanity. Concerning the honouring aspect, we see three marks: his position as a judge, his gender as a man, and the city location are his marks of honour.

The judge's title, a position of great honour, carries significant weight in his societal context and, therefore, suggests an honourable individual. The study agrees with Scott that the position of a judge is an honour, but we find it challenging to agree with his view that the honour here is ascribed.⁴¹ An acquisition is proposed because we do not presume there was a particular family in the first-century community where judges were selected. The view of acquired is that "acquired honour is achieved based on a person's moral character, actions, or performance."⁴² This form of honour is symbolized by name and can be won and lost through challenge and reciprocity.⁴³ The primary argument against honour as acquired will be related to the

²⁹ John G. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), 10.

³⁰ Moxnes, "Honour and Shame," 20.

³¹ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by J. H. Freese. Revised by Gisela Striker. LCL 193 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 53.

³² Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "Honour: Core Value in the Biblical World," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris (London: Routledge, 2010), 110.

³³ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 31.

³⁴ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 18.

³⁵ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 36.

³⁶ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 18.

³⁷ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 36.

³⁸ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 19.

³⁹ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 24.

⁴⁰ Mahlangu, "The Ancient Mediterranean Values," 90.

⁴¹ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 178.

⁴² DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 18.

⁴³ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 19; Malina, *New Testament World*, 37.

judge's moral character. The judge's position does not relate to the family/kinship system; therefore, he may have worked his way up to attain the position. The researchers believe his change of mind to grant the widow justice (18:4–5) is out of selfish interest to guard against losing his honourable position as a judge in his community.

The second concerns the location in which the judge is placed, that is, “a city.” Bruce Malina and Scott describe how such “elites fit into an honour and shame society.”⁴⁴ The third relates to gender since the male gender symbolizes honour, while that of females symbolizes shame. Aristotle wrote concerning gender that “the female is as it were a deformed male” (*Gen. an.* 737a.28).⁴⁵ It is also argued that “Providence made man stronger and woman weaker, so that he in virtue of his manly prowess may be more ready to defend the home, and she, by reason of her timid nature, more ready to keep watch over it” (*Oeconomica*, 1.4. 332–333).⁴⁶ These assertions place the judge as a male figure in an honourable position and the widow as a female figure in a dishonourable position.

The judge is described as a shameful person because he does not fear God nor respect humanity. This description corresponds closely to what Josephus uses in describing King Jehoiakim: “He proved to be unjust and wicked by nature, and was neither reverent toward God nor kind to man.”⁴⁷ Bailey asserts that “the same problem surfaced in NT times. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 287) describes judges in the city of Jerusalem who were traditionally so corrupt that they were called *Dayyaney Gezeloth* (Robber-Judges) rather than *Dayyaney Gezeroth* (Judges of Prohibitions), which was their real title.”⁴⁸ The judge's lack of care places him in a dishonourable, shameful position.

Again, in the description of the judge, “the word ἐντρεπόμενος, described as “no respect,” has the passive voice of ἐντρεπω meaning “to turn into oneself,” “to be afraid,” “to be ashamed,” and the active voice is ‘to make ashamed,’ (see also; 1 Cor 4:14).”⁴⁹ Bailey asserts that “starting with the Old Syriac, down through all the other Syriac and all the Arabic versions for another thousand years, the only translation we have had here in the Middle East is, ‘He is not ashamed before people.’”⁵⁰ Therefore, it can be argued that ἐντρεπω, translated as “respect,” belongs to the honour and shame vocabulary. Thus, the judge is seen as one with honourable marks yet exhibiting shameful attitudes, which will cause him to lose his honour.

Luke 18:3 introduces a widow as the second character in the parable. Similarly, she is also from a city (πόλει), just like the judge, but she has no position of honour compared to the judge; instead, she suffers injustice. The widow's location is the same as that of the unjust judge, which brings her into the judge's narrative space. However, from the narrator's description, her implied honour was denied.⁵¹

There are diverse views on why she (the widow) is seeking justice. David E. Garland gives a more detailed view as follows:

One can surmise that it was related to a financial settlement related to the death of her husband. Women could not inherit directly from their husbands (*m. B. Bat.* 8:1), but they were entitled to be maintained from their husbands' estate (*m. Ketub* 11:1; 12:3) or to receive their *Ketuba*, an amount of money in a prenuptial agreement that would be given to the wife in the event of divorce (*m. Ketub.* 4:2; 5:1). According to *m. Ketub* 4:12, a widow can remain in her husband's house and be supported

⁴⁴ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 178; Malina, *New Testament World*, 71–75.

⁴⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *The People of the Parables: Galilee in the Time of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2024), 72.

⁴⁶ Tredennick Aristotle and Hugh Armstrong, *The Metaphysics: Books X–XIV. Oeconomica; and, Magna Moralia*. (London: William Heinemann, 1947), 332–333.

⁴⁷ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume IV: Books 9–11, Transl. R. Marcus. LCL 326* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 202–23; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*.

⁴⁸ Bailey, ‘Through Peasant Eyes’ 267.

⁴⁹ Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 672; François Bovon, Donald S. Deer, and Helmut Koester, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ Bailey, , ‘Through Peasant Eyes’, 270.

⁵¹ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 180.

from his estate until the heirs are willing to give her the *ketuba*, her marriage settlement. When they do that, they can then send her away. She has no more rights.⁵²

The difficulty in identifying the actual problem is that the narrator does not tell what injustice she has suffered. Still, by placing her in the context of the first-century world, her status as a widow shows how vulnerable she is. This is because a widow was one of the special categories of persons (including orphans and foreigners) under the protection of God. Several scriptural passages show the vulnerability of women, especially widows (Isa 54:4, Ps 68:5, 1 Tim 5:5, Jas 1:27). Joseph Fitzmyer suggests that “she fits the OT picture of a widow to whom justice is often denied with references some selected passages (Exod 22:22–24; Deut 10:18; 24:17; Ruth 1:20–21; Lam 1:1; Isa 54:4 and Ps 68:5),” and further indicates this recall OT implication of disgrace, often associated with widowhood.⁵³ These assertions show that her status as a member of the lowest social structure.”⁵⁴ Hence, it is not a surprise that she is calling for justice.

The widow's call for justice leads her to penetrate the judge's social space. As a widow and as a woman, leaving her social space for a man's space is viewed as shameful because it is unusual for a woman to go to court.⁵⁵ However, “as a widow, she has a claim on him (the judge), but as a woman, she is an object of shame that threatens his honour.”⁵⁶ Again, about going to court, Malina asserts that “in the first-century world, routine legal procedures were used to dishonour someone or some group perceived to be of higher, more powerful status, and recourse to such procedures was an admission of inequality.”⁵⁷ Therefore, the widow “through her ‘shameless’ action, she stares down the barrel of societal injustice and wins.”⁵⁸ These views suggest that the widow going to court to seek justice would not possibly restore any honour for her, but her adversaries-opponents risk being dishonoured. Her adversaries-opponents are likely to be of the same rank as the judge because no one will take to court those whom they can challenge.

In Luke 18: 4–5, there is a dramatic change of mind by the judge. The judge initially refuses the request of the widow to grant her justice. The indefinite form of “for a time” (ἐπὶ χρόνον) shows his unwillingness; hence, his decision took some time. The most common argument is that the widow's continued appeal lets the unjust judge grant her request because he (the unjust judge) does not fear God and regard humanity. Another argument is that the unjust judge feared “a black eye” from the widow based on the Greek word ὑποπιάζει. As Spencer opines, “arguably, the most vivid and memorable part of Jesus' parable is the pugilistic image of the last two Greek words (ὑποπιάζει με), placed on the lips of the unjust judge: lest she [the widow] “give me a black eye” in 18:5.”⁵⁹ Therefore, a brief word study on ὑποπιάζει in Luke 18:5 is very significant in this parable, especially under honour and shame.

A Word Study on ὑποπιάζει (18:4–5).

The word ὑποπιάζω is the denominative verb ὑπόπιον, which means the “part of the face under the eyes,” “the eyes themselves,” or “the whole face.” In addition, ὑποπιάζω is a compound word from ὑπό, meaning “under,” and ὄψ, meaning “eye,” “face,” “countenance.” Hence, it can be translated as “to strike under the eyes,” “beat the face black and blue,” or “give a black eye.”⁶⁰ The table that follows details the range of possible meanings of the word.

⁵² Garland, *Luke, ZECNT*, 709; Cotter, “The Parable of the Feisty Widow and the Threatened Judge (Luke 18.1–8)” 336–37; Brian C. Stiller, *Preaching the Parable to Postmoderns* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 128.

⁵³ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1178–79.

⁵⁴ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 181.

⁵⁵ Bailey, ‘Through Peasant Eyes’, 271; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 182.

⁵⁶ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 182.

⁵⁷ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 43.

⁵⁸ Herzog, *The Parable as Subversive Speech*, 231–32.

⁵⁹ Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 266.

⁶⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1994), 1430; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Milford: Mott Media, 1982), 646.

Table 1: Range of Possible Meanings of ὑπωπιάζει within Major Lexicons and Dictionaries.

Lexicon	Meaning /Entry
BDAG (1979:1043)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To blacken an eye, give a black eye, strike in the face (Luke 18:5). • To bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down (Luke 18:5). • To put under strict discipline, punish, treat roughly, torment (1 Cor 9:27).
L&N (1989: 315,752)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To cause great annoyance and thus wear someone out (Luke 18:5). • To strike the eye. • To exercise self-control. Thus, to keep one's body under complete control, with the implication of rough treatment given to the body, possibly as an aspect of discipline (1 Cor 9:27).
LSJ (1968:1904)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strike one under the eye, give him a black eye (Luke 18:5) • To bruise, mortify, I Cor 9:27; also annoy greatly, wear out (Luke 18:5).
Thayer (1982:646)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A blow in that part of the face; a black and blue spot, a bruise: like a boxer, I buffet my body, handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships, I Cor 9: 27. • To give one intolerable annoyance ['beat one out,' 'wear one out'], by entreaties, Luke 18:5.
Zodhiates (1994:1430)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strike under the eyes, beat the face black and blue, give a black eye. In the NT, generally, to mistreat, that is, to subject the body to hardship, mortify (1 Cor 9:27). Figuratively, to weary with prayers and to tire out someone, with the account (Luke 18:5).
MM (1997:461)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The subst. ὑπόπιον, from which this verb is derived, denoted primarily “the part of the face under the eye,” and hence a blow in the face,” or “a bruise” generally. Therefore, the verb is to be understood “treat severely as in 1 Cor 9:27 but passes into the meaning of “weary” in Luke 18:5.
TDNT (1972: 590-91)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strike someone on the face (under the eyes) in such a way that he gets a “black eye” and is disfigured as a result. • To blow in the face, “contusion.” The LXX has only the noun ὑπόπιον but in the sense “blow in the face,” “contusion” in Prov 20:30. The Hebrew equivalent is תַּרְתֵּן.
EDNT (1990:409)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDNT agrees with LSJ and TDNT to explain the verb as strike under the eye, strike in the face, torment. Literal in Luke 18:5: “so that she does not strike me in the face”; and in 1 Cor 9:27, figuratively alluding to boxing (cf. v. 26); “I torment my body.”
Strong (2010:1539)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to wear out, weaken. • to beat up, treat roughly. • keep under, wear

An analysis of the table reveals three essential meanings, two of which are metaphorical or figurative, and the other literal meaning. The literal meaning is mainly translated as “to give a black eye,” and the figurative or metaphorical meaning is either translated as “wear out” or “put under strict discipline. It must also be noted that ὑπωπιάζει is a word used for boxing,⁶¹ and appears only in Luke 18:5 and I Cor 9:27 in the NT corpus and *hapax legomena* in the LXX (Prov 20:30).

⁶¹ Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody : Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 58.

Further research study on this word concerning honour and shame indicates that the Hebrew equivalent is חָבַרָה and has the root *hbr*, which is an Arabic root.⁶² For its use in the OT, “the Arabic root *hbr* is represented in Hebrew by *chabhûrâh*, “wound, weal” (Gen 4:23; Exod 21:25; Isa 1:6; 53:5; Ps 38:6 [Eng v. 5]; Prov 20:30), and *chabharburôth*, “spots (of a leopard)” (Jer 13:23).”⁶³ Young believes the Hebrew word *paga* is also very near in meaning because it can refer to a physical blow and injury to a person's honour.⁶⁴ In addition to the Hebrew meaning is that of Syriac, Arabic, and Akkadian, summarized as “חַבְרָה and *חַבְרָה (BL 480s, 598): I חַבַּר; MHb. חַבְרָה, Syr. *hbärtâ*; Arb. *habr* scar, *habîr* striped; Akk. *ibāru* (birth-mark Kraus MVAeG 40/2:39f; AHw. 363a); → *חַבְרָהוֹת: חַבְרָהוֹת, חַבְרָהוֹת, חַבְרָהוֹת; wound, slash (|| מַכָּה, פְּצָעָה) Gen 4:22; Exod 21:25; Isa 1:6; 53:5; Ps 38:6; Prov 20:30” (HALOT 285).

Geoffrey Lampe also thoroughly researched how the word was used in the patristic era. His summary identifies bruising, the mortification of the body, oppression, crush, distress, and trouble as the essential patristic meanings of the word.⁶⁵

Across church history, the translation of ὑποπιάζειν shifted more to a figurative or metaphorical translation than a literal translation. For example, Duncan Derrett referred to Macarius Magnes, who used the word “in the sense of 'disgraces' (of sons that disgrace their fathers) at *Apocriticus* (1876), 11. 19 (35, 1. 7) and in the sense of 'besmirchings' (suffered by public speakers) (83, 1. 15).”⁶⁶ Derrett further opines that Plutarch also uses the word “in the sense of 'besmirch' (of the Moon as the victim of amateur lunographers) (*Mor.* II, 921; a universally accepted conjecture), because it was literally most appropriate.”⁶⁷⁶⁸ Young also asserts that Diogenes Laertius uses the term to describe an exchange between Crates and Nicodromos in the gymnasium that resulted in a blow to the face because of an insult. The Cynic Crates was “struck in the face” by the Nicodromos and avenged himself by putting the culprit's name on his disfigured face (*Crates* 6.89)⁶⁹

Modern scholars still debate whether the Lukan version must be translated literally or figuratively. John Nolland suggests “ὑποπιάζω should be translated as shame me and asserts that if we are right to understand ὑποπιάζω in connection with notions of shame, then we have yet another link with Luke 11:5–8.”⁷⁰ Bailey and Scott do not prefer the translation of the word as shame. However, it must be indicated that both Bailey and Scott acknowledge the honour and shame aspect of the word. Their rejection stems from the fact that the judge does not feel ashamed because he does not respect God or humans.⁷¹

It is also argued that “the judge, fearing a blow to the eye, is boxed in. By ignoring the woman, he faces physical threats. This brings public humiliation by a widow to him, which is indeed an honour and shame issue. Thereby, by acceding to her demands, he shows she has defeated him.”⁷² This explanation that the unjust judge will be humiliated connotes a sense of shame. The unjust judge fears that if he does not do something, this widow will slander him or hurt his reputation, figuratively striking him to disfigure him. He (the unjust judge) knows that if she (the widow) continues to make it public, the people will eventually support her, and he will lose face value.⁷³ The judge, foreseeing that the woman's constant coming based on her request would subsequently affect him, decided to take up her case, finally leading to her receiving justice.

⁶² Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).194.

⁶³ Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*.194.

⁶⁴ Young, *The Parables*, 58–9.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968),1452.

⁶⁶ J. M. Duncan Derrett, “Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Unjust Judge,” *NTS* 18 (1972): 189–91.

⁶⁷ Derrett, “Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Unjust Judge.”

⁶⁸ Derrett, “Law in the New Testament,” 191.

⁶⁹ Young, *The Parables*, 58.

⁷⁰ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC. Dallas: Word Books, 1982), 865.

⁷¹ Bailey, ‘*Through Peasant Eyes*’, 265; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 185

⁷² Ben Witherington and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Gospel of Luke* (NCBC Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 487.

⁷³ Herzog, *The Parable as Subversive Speech*, 230-31; John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988),184.

Most scholars and commentators now advocate for figurative translation; however, its interpretation is debated on whether it relates to reputation, as in shame and disgrace or as to the judge being worn out because of the widow's persistence. The theme of "to wear one out" is what most Bible versions and commentaries are using to interpret the verb ὑπωπιάζει, yet it must be noted that the Bible commentaries surveyed acknowledged that the meaning of the word ὑπωπιάζει means "give a black eye." It is their translation and interpretation that cause the diverse views. We opine that Bible translators and various Bible versions avoided the literal translation because of the violence it connotes in the boxing motif. Spencer is right to assert that:

A tinge of violence shades the scene, all the more as we play up the boxing motif. It is hard to see Luke's Jesus even hinting at such reprisal, in light of his resolute turn-the-check, the love-your-enemy policy of non-violence (Luke 6:27-36). This parable is not about "might make right" in terms of violence. We must, therefore, be careful about how we understand victimhood in Jesus' parable.⁷⁴

Parables teach moral and spiritual lessons and do not require a literal translation of violence, but a figurative or metaphorical translation that brings out the meaning of a black eye.

This study, therefore, argues that the word wear out is not a helpful translation. Will someone walking through town with a black eye mean they are worn out? Of course, NO; "the unspeakable humiliation situation of a judge walking through the main streets with a black eye, the jeers, jokes, and snide comments, is a terrible prospect and one to be avoided at all costs."⁷⁵ The unjust judge, therefore, saw the need to prevent such a black eye concept because it would affect his honour, especially the honour being symbolled by name and not blood. He can lose this honour whenever there is a challenge and reposit.

Derrett, analyzing the word ὑπωπιάζει in the context of honour and shame, also asserts that:

"To give a black eye" is a well-known ancient Asian idea, and interpreting "ὑπωπιάζει" as a "bruise" or "insult" should not be the point. Again, "to blacken my face!" a well-known expression throughout the Orient, is not unknown in Hebrew. The term is available in Arabic (where the overtones of final disgrace are drawn from the Quranic examples), in Persian (where it is commonplace), in Turkish, and in all languages of the Indian subcontinent, including those spoken by people of very dark skin. Therefore, he has "blackened my face," which means "he has effectively slandered me, or has treated me in such a way that my prestige has fallen; he has, in effect, disgraced me." "My face has been blackened" means "I have been disgraced."⁷⁶

All possible meanings of the word show a sense of shame and disgrace. Even if one does not put the body under discipline, as pointed out in Pauline's version, the person will be subject to embarrassment or humiliation in the end. Anyone who does not prepare adequately before any sporting event will likely come out as a loser. The study proposes that the sense of honour and shame must be demonstrated in metaphorical or figurative use. A non-literal translation that takes away the impact of honour and shame will not be helpful to the reader. It can be argued that no matter how this word is translated, it has a sense of shame.

In summary, the main parable clearly reflects honour and shame. This is reflected in the argument that the Judge has three marks of honour: gender, position/title, and location, while his description and attitude are shameful (lack of honour). The widow, with her implied honour, also has shameful characteristics based on her gender as a woman and for leaving a social space to the man's space (going to court, especially alone). On ὑπωπιάζει, the researchers assert that the translation and interpretation of this word must resonate with terminology that reflects an honour and shame culture. Considering such a first-century world, Jesus' audience would have understood the verb ὑπωπιάζει in the parable as an issue of honour and shame, not about violence. Therefore, in matters like this, modern translations should place the phrase or word in scare quotes

⁷⁴ Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 292.

⁷⁵ Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty widow," 341.

⁷⁶ Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 189-91.

with a brief explanation in a footnote.⁷⁷ Hence, ὑποπίαζι opens doors to further research that connects to social-scientific study. In the context of this work, ὑποπίαζι must be understood as relating to honour and shame terminologies such as “shaming,” “loss of reputation,” and/or “disgrace.” The study, therefore, proceeds with the interpretative frame of (18:1, 6–8).

Analysis of the Parable Interpretative Frame (18:1, 6–8) and related themes.

In the main parable (18:2–5), it has been demonstrated how honour and shame are pivotal in understanding the narrative. One strand of interpretation suggests that the interpretative frame should be set aside to let the parable speak for itself. Whenever that happens, the interpreter inevitably adds their own frame of reference, consciously or unconsciously.⁷⁸ Therefore, the interpretive frame (18:1, 6–8) and how it helps to understand the various themes applied to the parable will be analysed.

The immediate context of this parable begins in Luke 17, where Jesus teaches about the coming of the kingdom of God and the need for readiness and perseverance in faith. This then calls for continual prayer. Hultgren, under the theme of the prayer, opines that “etymologically, the word ἐγκακεῖν means “to act badly” and later came to mean to grow weary.”⁷⁹ To act badly means to show dishonourable behaviour, which resonates with shameful attitudes. Similarly, the concluding part of the parable, referring to the coming of the Son of Man (18:8), certainly links the parable with the preceding context of Luke 17:20–37.

To deepen the understanding of prayer and establish a closer connection with an honour and shame world, a comparison can be drawn intertext with Sirach 35:14–25. With its striking similarities in vocabulary, structure, and theme, this passage enriches the analysis and underscores the depth of the parable's theological implications. Spencer makes an intriguing assertion here,

“There is a marked difference in setting: in Sirach, the entire scene plays out in a heavenly courtroom where the widow’s prayer cries “reach to the clouds” and to the ears of the divine magistrate (“for the Lord is the judge”); there is no countervailing earthly scene, as in Jesus’ parable hardened secular judge.” Without this-worldly judicial complication, the Sirach drama unfolds without a hitch.”⁸⁰

Spencer's assertion implies that God is honourable and does not need to be badgered into listening to the pleas of oppressed widows, responding only grudgingly to protect God’s semblance of honour.⁸¹ As regards the unjust judge in the parable of Luke 18:1–8, “No one can appeal to him, saying, “for the sake of God,” because he does not fear God, and no one can plead, “for my sake,” because he does not regard any human. He possesses no inner sense of honour to which supplicants can appeal.”⁸² It has already been indicated that the etymology of the word translated as “grow weary” relates to “acting badly,” which resonates with shameful attitudes.

The coming of the Son of Man (18:8b) is associated with the final judgment (eschatology). God is honourable, so his decision will not be influenced by anything dishonourable or shameful, such as a bribe. Luke 18:6 shows Jesus employing the rabbinic principle of interpretation known as “how much more” (*qal waomer*). If persistence yields a positive result in this somewhat amusing scenario, how much more when humbly approaching an honourable God? The emphasis here implies that believers are not standing before a dishonourable judge who is indifferent to their needs and easily swayed by bribes.

Scott also believes that the parable is part of the Kingdom of God parable and, therefore, in such an honoured and shameful world, the earthly world will not recognize God’s Kingdom because its coming will

⁷⁷ Fredrick J. Long, “The God of This Age’ (2 Cor 4:4) and Paul’s Empire-Resisting Gospel,” in *The First Urban Churches: Roman Corinth Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 7*, ed. James R. Harrison and Laurence L. Welborn, vol. 2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 219–69.

⁷⁸ Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 263.

⁷⁹ Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 252.

⁸⁰ Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 300–302.

⁸¹ Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 295.

⁸² Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 264.

look like a shameful kingdom.⁸³ Scott's view here is laudable, considering the context in which the parable was told.

The rhetorical question in Luke 18:7–8a emphasizes that God is indeed honourable and faithfully upholds his covenant by showing honour to his people and bringing shame upon their enemies. Consequently, the chosen ones are called upon to reciprocate by honouring God through loyalty and obedience, a crucial aspect of faithfulness. Therefore, when God's people experience shame, they call upon him to vindicate their status.

The conclusion drawn here is that, right from the beginning of the parable (18:1), Jesus informs his audience that they need to pray so that they do not act badly, meaning shamefully. The main parable is then told to let them understand why they may act badly/shamefully when they do pray. A sharp contrast drawn in 18:6 prepares the audience's mind to see a different identity. The new identity is God, and the parable affirms God as honourable by looking at the two rhetorical questions in 18:7–8a. The parable ends with an expectation that God's people will live honourably as they await the return of the Son of Man. This shows that both the main parable and the interpretative frame resonate well with honour and shame.

The researchers are of the view that honour and shame can serve as an umbrella for the diverse themes given by scholars in interpreting the parable. For instance, from the perspective of prayer, Christians need not lose heart because an honourable God always listens to his people. Prayer enables one to stand firm and, therefore, has a high chance of not acting badly or shamefully, especially in public. Losing a heart may lead to acting badly, which is shameful. Therefore, God requires each person to be consistent in prayer, a potential source of acting honourably. In relating the theme of prayer to eschatology, the parable considers the need to keep faith and trust God because of his honourable status, for he will not shame his people when they call on him. Christians must also live an honourable life as they await his coming.

On the themes of Justice and injustice, the contrast in 18:6 demonstrates that God is honourable and always fair in his judgment, unlike the unjust judge. God's justice is not swayed by bribery and corruption – a shameful act that has taken dominance in the contemporary world, especially in developing countries. God is an honourable one and does not give in to bribes. The theme of gender relates well to justice and injustice. There is no argument that, despite Human Rights policies, gender discrimination still exists. God is honourable, and therefore, he does not discriminate when it comes to gender. He listens to the prayers of everyone, both marginalized and unmarginalized.

Another central theme is the metaphor of the Kingdom. The kingdom continuously advances and suffers violence, and it may even appear in the form of shamelessness as one lacking honour. Certainly, the message of the Cross is foolish to the unbelievers, and surely, the cross is shameful to this first-century community. Therefore, the honourable Kingdom [heaven] may seem unattractive [shameful] to them. Christians must, thus, keep faith in God because he (God) is honourable. All these points that the honour and shame model serves as an umbrella for the diverse themes scholars have given to this parable.

CONCLUSION

This paper offers a fresh reading of the parable of the widow and the judge in Luke's narrative (18:1–8) from a sociological perspective using the honour and shame model. It is clear from the study that Luke was deeply embedded in the social realities and dynamics of the first-century context. The main parable shows how honour and shame, like two sides of the coin, affect the unjust judge and the widow regarding occupation, morality, gender, and family life. In addition, word study on the verb ὑπωπιάζει shows it resonates well with honour and shame terminologies. The interpretative frame also supports the honour and shame model by showing how honourable God contrasts with a dishonourable judge. This then calls for one to pray so they may not act shamefully. Again, the study shows how the various themes surrounding the parable can be best understood from the perspective of honour and shame.

⁸³ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 187.

This study, therefore, affirms its research thesis that analyzing the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1–8 without considering the sociocultural dynamics of honour and shame would overlook aspects of the narrative that would have resonated strongly with its original audience. Hence, reading the parable with a sense of first-century honour and shame expands the exegetical boundaries, and the diverse themes surrounding the parable are better understood.

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