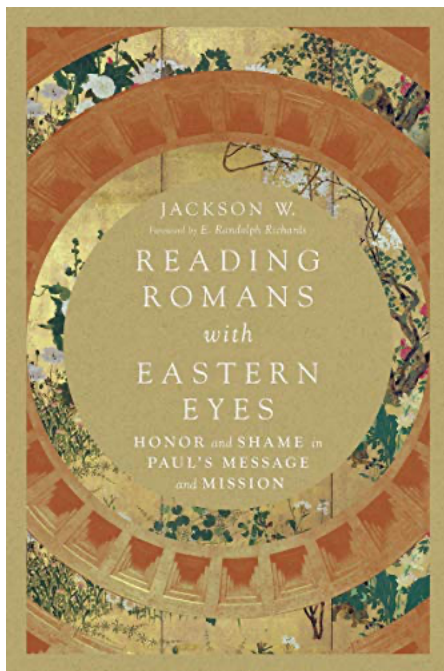


Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission

By Jackson Wu

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Summary

This book, which is not a commentary on Romans, “seeks to offer a biblically faithful reading of Romans through Eastern eyes” (page 4). Reading through Eastern eyes refers to how considering East Asian culture can help interpret Romans, realizing that many similarities exist between people in traditional East Asian cultures and the ancient biblical world. In his book, Jackson W. (a pseudonym) raised this basic question: How did Paul’s theology serve the purpose of his mission with an honor–shame context?

To answer this question, the author provides 12 chapters, surfacing issues in Romans that relate to honor, shame, collective identity, hierarchy, harmony, and other related cultural themes. Without casting aside insights from Western scholars, the book presents a fresh understanding of Romans with a new cultural lens.

Best Illustration

Here are two examples of how distinction between lawbreaking and losing face can be blurry: (1) in the ancient Chinese Tang Code (grand)children could be put to death for accusing their (grand)parents of a crime; and (2) in 2013, a Thai man was sentenced to 10 years in prison because in Thailand it is a “crime to defame, insult or threaten the king, queen, heir to the throne or regent.” (Page 39)

Best Idea

An honor–shame perspective has three distinguishing emphases: (1) tradition (stability and practice); (2) relationship (collectivism and social identity); and (3) hierarchy (position and authority). These three factors shape a person’s social status, reputation, or “face.” Pages 13–18

Best Take Away

Sin means dishonoring God and thus acting shamefully. Human sin makes God lose face. Saying God “loses face” means that sin publicly dishonors God. Page 45

Our Recommendation

We recommend this book to pastors, missionaries, biblical scholars, and students who want to gain a fresh understanding of Romans, using honor-shame perspectives and East Asian cultural insights. The book offers an exegetical foundation of various passages in Romans but factors in relevant cultural and social issues that relate to the gospel, church, and mission. A discussion guide at the end of the book (pages 193-196) presents reflection questions for personal or group use.

Best Quotes

"The idea that one can achieve an acultural theology is a fundamental fallacy." (David Clark) Page 2

"A monocultural lens is myopic." Page 2

"The ability to assume multiple cultural perspectives is essential for biblical interpretation." Page 8

"East Asian ideals or desired values include past-time orientation, respect for hierarchy, interdependence, group orientation (collectivism), face, modesty, and harmony with others." (Zhu Bo) Page 11

"A person's honor or 'face' is one's perceived worth according to the agreed standards of a particular social context.... In many ways, East Asians prioritize ascribed honor over achieved honor." Pages 14-15

"Chinese care more about 'this life' than the next." Page 17

"In a 'face economy,' personal and collective identity are closely wed together. Face is like 'social currency.' It is given, received, and shared." Page 18

"Ironically, respect for authority and tradition is one reason many East Asians are slow to develop theologies with distinct East Asian characteristics." Page 19

"Christ is the fulcrum for grasping the relationship between God's glory and humanity's glory." Page 22 "Positively, Romans serves as a grand reorientation of cultural values around Christ." Page 28

"Our view of the church—our collective identity—shapes our sense of mission. The way the Romans see themselves (as Greek or Jew) and outsiders (like barbarians) determines whether they glorify God by participating in his mission to the nations." Page 31

"Paul recognizes the relationship between gospel and group identity. The gospel declares Christ as king of all nations, not merely Jews. The scope of Christ's kingship includes people from every ethnic and social group." Page 36

"God is Israel's true claim to honor. By forsaking God's glory, they in fact forfeit their own glory." Page 43

"Both business executives and pastors are susceptible to people-pleasing and vain ambition. The allure of praise drives us to overwork, overspend, and overlook our families." Page 49

"Gratitude is an effective strategy to combat idolatrous glory seeking. Genuine gratitude reveals a person's delight in the Giver of grace." Page 50

"To restore our honor, we must remember our shame." Page 52

"Ancient gift-giving typically entailed reciprocity from the recipient such that exchanging gifts brought people together in relationship." Page 54

"When ethnic and national categories primarily determine social identity, they contradict the gospel." Page 57

"Paul's comments remind us there is no 'me' without 'we.' Our relationships influence how we see the world, our ethical choices, and the significance we give to actions, symbols, and social identity." Page 65

"The gospel calls people into a community, not individuals out of culture." Page 66

"Comparison is the thief of joy. Either it discourages us or makes us proud." Page 67

"Human sin is the backdrop against which God's glory is magnified." Page 71

"God in Christ vindicates his honor by demonstrating his righteousness. In this sense, Christ saves God's face. Because of the cross, all nations will see God's glory." Page 74

"God does not stake his honor on the passing sensibilities of any culture, denomination, or generation." Page 77

"Justification is a declaration akin to an adoption decree. Adoption imputes filial status." Page 84

"What sense does it make to imagine salvation in terms of an individual's relationship with God distinct from belonging to God's people? From an Eastern perspective, such thinking verges on abstraction." Page 94

"Because the gospel demands allegiance to Christ, it necessarily entails belonging to his kingdom people." Page 97

"Justification is all about being declared to be a member of God's people; and this people is defined in relation to the Messiah himself." (N.T. Wright) Page 107

"True glory and honor are found in Christ, not in the absence of pain. Salvation manifests in character not mere comfort." Page 110

"Christ's followers ultimately attain their hope through his suffering." Page 120

"Suffering is a necessary means of expressing loyalty to Christ. Those belonging to Christ will be vindicated." Page 122

"Idolatry is rooted not in the search for honor but in the source of one's glory." Page 124

"Being put to shame is the objective consequence of sin, not simply a psychological response and fear." Page

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"What is the relationship between the potter-clay analogy and honor-shame? The imagery magnifies the sovereign Creator's glory and exposes the impotence of false gods and those who hope in them." Page 151

"Notice how God's people show familial love: 'Outdo one another in showing honor.' The competition is not for honor but to honor." Page 163

"But Christ's followers too often confuse political opinions with God's explicit commands." Page 172

"Private influence does not exist, since we all live in a web of countless interconnected social relationships." Page 172

"Instead of negative duties ('duties of omission'), Eastern cultures emphasize positive duties ('duties of commission'). People are mindful of their responsibilities, not simply their rights." Page 176

"Since there is one God, Christ's church consists of all nations, transcending cultural distinctions." Page 181

"An Eastern emphasis on reciprocity in relationships helps recover a more ancient view of grace and therefore the ability to bear with others." Page 186

"Relationships 'in Christ' make practical demands on our lives." Page 192
Listen to the interview with the author [here](#).