

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

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According to Jackson W., some traditional East Asian cultural values are closer to those of the first-century biblical world than common Western cultural values. In this work Jackson demonstrates how paying attention to East Asian culture provides a helpful lens for interpreting Paul's most complex letter, and we see how honor and shame shape so much of Paul's message and mission.

Understanding Honor-Shame in Church Theology

Why did you decide to explore the idea of honor-shame cultures and the book of Romans?

Jackson W.: Living in East Asia, I've long been sensitive to ways honor and shame influence our daily lives. When I read Romans, I observe numerous references to honor and shame, both explicit and implicit. However, commentators routinely overlook or minimize the theological and missiological significance of these themes within Paul's letter. Evangelicals seem particularly reluctant to highlight the influence of honor and shame, which are deemed sociological or anthropological concepts, only related indirectly to theology. I also had a missiological motivation for writing this book. For years, I've heard Chinese people claim the Bible is a Western book. Traditional interpretations of Romans are not necessarily wrong, yet they focus on questions arising from Western history. Consequently, Chinese believers did not realize how Eastern the book of Romans is and indeed the entire Bible.

What is the thesis for *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes*?

Jackson: This book demonstrates the importance of interpreting Romans from the perspective of honor and shame. Given the substantial impact of Romans on the church, if something were to alter our understanding of Romans, we would expect to see significant ripple effects in the church's ongoing theology and mission. When we interpret Romans with an honor-shame perspective, we come away with a far more holistic view of the gospel and Christian life. Yet, too few people grasp honor and shame. Many miss the fact that honor and shame conveys an entire way of seeing the world.

How do you hope this book impacts the way people read Romans?

Jackson: Readers see practically how our cultural lens shapes our theology, yet this fact does not require we commit eisegesis, forcing one's views into the biblical text. A truly historical reading is a humble one, requiring the perspective of the whole church. This book seeks to exemplify a middle way that mends old dichotomies. One cannot ignore tradition, nor can we underestimate the influence of culture. A more global perspective will both correct and supplement traditional interpretations of Romans. In so doing, the church can mature in its unity and manner of doing gospel ministry around the world.

How does this book relate to the body of your scholarly work?

Jackson: My scholarly work focuses on the intersection of theology and missiology. To bring these two fields together, we must engage in exegesis. This book demonstrates one way to do this. While biblical scholars might come across my journal articles on Romans, they are less likely to read missiological publications, which provide the cultural background and significance that inform my exegesis. Likewise, a typical missionary is less familiar with debates and insights current

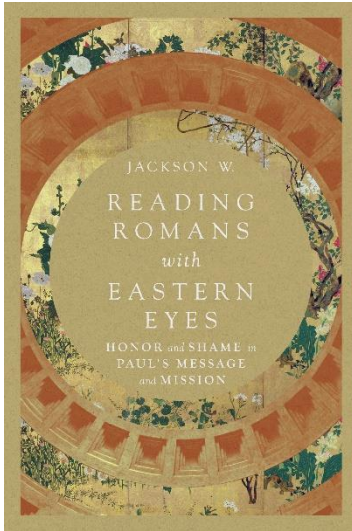


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Jackson W. (pseudonym; PhD, Southeastern Baptist), has lived and worked in East Asia for almost two decades and serves on the Asian/Asian-American Theology steering committee of the Evangelical Theological Society. He is the author of *Saving God's Face* and *The Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization*. Although not Chinese, he teaches theology and missiology for Chinese pastors at a seminary in Asia.

within theology and biblical studies. I hope this book provides more opportunity to discuss the missiological nature of theology and the theological nature of missiology.

What do you hope *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes* contributes to the church and academia?

Jackson: (1) Demonstrates the influence of culture and the importance of an East Asian lens for exegesis and theology. (2) Illustrates the significance of honor-shame in the church's theology and practice. (3) Suggests ways an East Asian reading contributes to and reframes debates about Paul's letter, perhaps even serving as a bridge between competing perspectives.



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