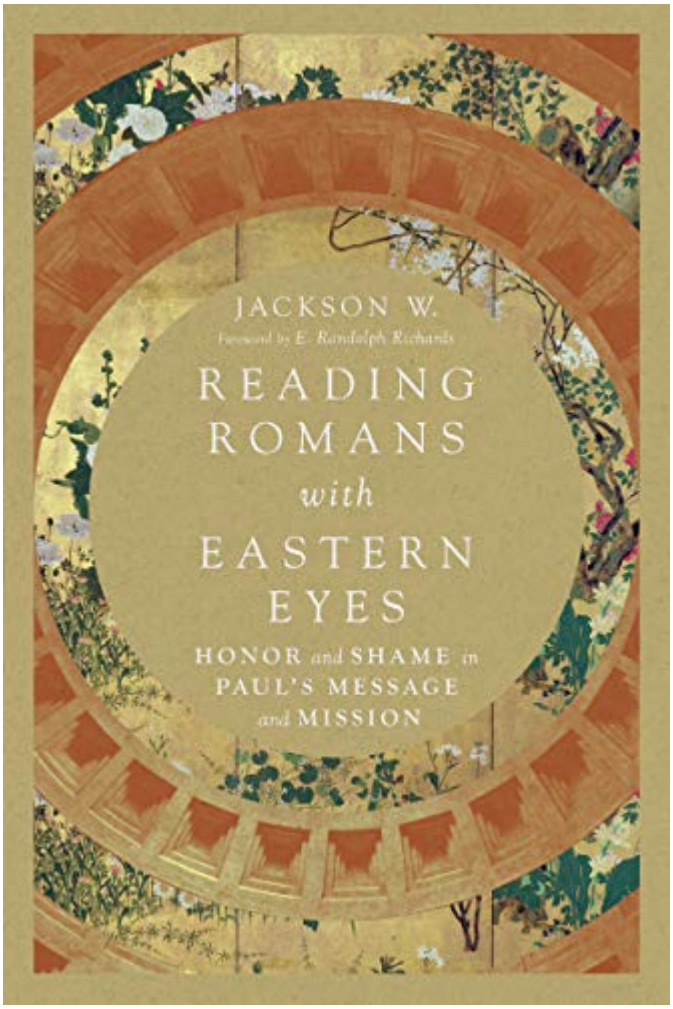
BOOKS I HAVE READ: READING ROMANS WITH EASTERN EYES

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Reading Romans through an Eastern lens thus restores a more Pauline perspective by bringing together the false Western dichotomy between "spiritual" and "secular." We need not accept the false dilemma between evangelism and social ministry.
Category: Observations

OK, I admit it, I am forever writing that some book or other is an absolute "must-read". It's easy for me to say, I read very quickly and reading books is part of my job - it's probably isn't possible for others who don't have these luxuries to keep up with everything that I say they should read.



Nevertheless; Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and MissionÂ must be considered a must-read. Certainly, anyone who is planning to preach on Paul at some point in the near future should read this. It isn't really optional.

Most popular guides to the book of Romans provide a summary of the argument running through the book, noting the role of the various "buts" and "therefores". It is presented as a tight, thought-through argument which flows seamlessly from one point to another (even if chapters 9-11 don't quite seem to fit). The problem with this approach is that it makes various (generally unspoken) assumptions about Paul, his world view and his religious context. To put it bluntly, we tend to read Paul as though he were a modern Western individualist, we don't think twice about this because it suits our approach precisely because we are modern Western individualists.

This is a medium-format paperback of around 230 pages, with an extensive index and reference list as well as some study questions. It is not an easy read; it is a book to study, rather than a page-turner. You don't need a background in cultural-anthropology to read this, but some familiarity with

the book of Romans is essential. It will set you back around Â£16 and is worth every penny.

Jackson W. asks a fundamental question, what does Romans look like if we read it from an Eastern, honour-shame viewpoint rather than from a Western legal-guilt framework? This sort of approach may make a few die-hard Protestants splutter over their cornflakes, but the simple truth is that Paul was writing from a very different cultural background than our own - one which was probably far closer to an Eastern honour-shame culture that it is to ours. Jackson W. clearly points out that Romans is replete with references to an honour-shame worldview. If we are going to do Paul justice, then we need to take this seriously.

There are pragmatic reasons for this approach, too. The first is that approaching Romans from a different viewpoint allows us to grasp new things from the text without losing the things we already understand.

> *While there is no contradiction between honour-shame and law-orientated explanations of salvation, different emphases come into focus when reading Scripture with Eastern eyes.*
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> *To gain an honour-shame perspective of salvation, some readers might need to re-orient how then think about "being saved." Salvation concerns both what we are savedÂ from and what we're savedÂ for. Many people think almost exclusively in terms of the former.*

Another reason for thinking in terms of honour-shame, is that our society is increasingly adopting this sort of approach to life, rejecting the legal-guilt framework that we have historically lived with. If we are to speak prophetically to this generation, we will need to address issues such as loss of face and honour culture - and thankfully RomansÂ does just that.

I can't recapitulate the central argument of the book, it would take too long and I'm not sure that I would be capable of doing it justice. So this is more of a recommendation than a review. You need to read this book!

I'll conclude with the closing few paragraphs from the book:

> *Relationships "in Christ" makeÂ practical demands on our lives. Paul doesn't settle for mere theological or theoretical unity. Reading Romans through an Eastern lens thus restores a more Pauline perspective by bringing together the false Western dichotomy between "spiritual" and "secular." We need not accept the false dilemma between evangelism and social ministry. Hence Paul intertwines spiritual blessing and material obligation in Romans 15:27 (compare 1 Corinthians 9:11).*
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> *Paul's admonition remind us afresh that faith, like honour is essentially public:*
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> *"American Christians will often say that true character is what you do when no one is watching... In stark contrast to this perspective, Paul was very concerned about how his*

> *followers' behaviour was perceived by others. The reason for this, to be frank, is because the reputation of some of Paul's churches was in the sewer."*
>
> *Shame prefers to remain hidden. It creeps into our lives when faith remains private. The seeds of hypocrisy take root where our private life is divided from our public life. The church is the unique context where Christian views of honour and shame make sense and produce "the obedience of faith."*