SBC Chapel Dr. Andrew Spurgeon

2 February 2015 NT Professor, Asian Christian Academy

Session 1 Notes by Dr. Rick Griffith, Singapore Bible College

**Reading Romans from an Asian Perspective**

***If Paul addressed Christians in Singapore or India, what would he emphasize?***

**Topic:** Interpretation

**Subject:** If Paul addressed Christians in Singapore or India, what would he emphasize?

**Complement:** He would speak of honor, family loyalty, ritual purity and through third parties.

**Purpose:** The listeners will read Romans with eastern as well as western eyes.

# Introduction

### Interest: In 2000, Andrew visited his bank in India and was left alone in the bank room when everyone left for tea break. Before him lay millions in rupees, so when they returned, he asked them why trusted him not to steal any of it. They responded, “We trust you. We ascribe honor to you.”

### Need: To what extent do you read your own culture into Scripture? Asia is a continent of honor, but do we see this in the Bible, which is not a western document?

### Subject: If Paul addressed Christians in Singapore or India, what would he emphasize?

# I. Honor: There are various types of honor that are especially emphasized in Asia.

## **Acquired** **Honor** refers to respect that one has earned through good works.

## **Ascribed Honor**

### **Ascribed *Positive* Honor** is respect due to describing who a person is rather than due to what the person has done. In this case the Bible mentions a positive trait of the person prior to noting his failings.

#### Noah was righteous in the sight of God (Gen. 6) prior to his drunkenness (Gen. 9).

#### “Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, abiding blameless in all the commandments and righteous requirements of the Lord” (Luke 1:5-6) is provided before he fails to believe the angel’s message.

#### Simeon was righteous and devout (Luke 2:25).

#### Joseph was righteous and didn’t wish to divorce Mary (Matt. 1:19).

### **Ascribed *Negative* Honor**

#### “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen. 11:30).

#### “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

#### The nearer kinsman in Ruth is left nameless; to name him would be to dishonor him.

#### The manager at the wedding in Cana also is not named,

#### Abigail’s husband is also nameless as he is called “Mr. Fool.”

#### Pharisees were self-proclaimed righteous, ascribing this to themselves.

# II. Family Loyalty: We must distinguish legality and relationship, yet the Scripture emphasizes family loyalty.

## A grandpa giving a beer to his 20-year-old grandson is viewed differently in the East (relational honor given to him) than in the West (legal honor given to the law against giving alcohol to under-age drinkers).

## Judah: “She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah” (Gen. 38:26 NAU). He saw his failings but respected her for her family loyalty.

## “So Sarai said to Abram, ‘Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her’” (Gen. 16:2 NAU). She saw *herself* having a child.

## Rachel said, “Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children” (Gen. 30:3 NAU).

## “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us run…” (Heb. 12:1 NAU) tells us that we should give respect (veneration?) to those who preceded us.

# III. Ritual Purity

## David was more concerned about Bathsheba’s menstrual purity than the fact that he had taken another man’s wife (2 Sam. 12).

## In the Philippines, when a local finds a well-paying job in the Middle East, the relatives quit their jobs and wait for the check from their relative.

# IV. Third-Party Negotiations

## Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. He didn’t want to lose face by going to Paddan Aram himself, for they might reject him as one who had voluntarily gone away.

## Elijah uses his servant to negotiate with Naaman (2 Sam. 5). The potential of losing face would be high if he went personally.

## The third angel could have been a third-party negotiator rather than God himself (Gen. 19).

## Paul often sent emissaries on his behalf: “That’s why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go” (1 Cor. 4:17 NAU).

## Abraham has a title (“Our forefather according to the flesh” Rom. 4:1) while David lacks one (“just as David also…” Rom. 4:6), yet neither could be justified by works. Both are third-party negotiators and bad examples of family loyalty (offering his wife and stealing a wife). Jews claim affinity to Abraham and David, but they shouldn't since they both are bad examples of family loyalty. Only God is faithful. Jews who trusted their forefathers are in no better position than Gentiles, who had no such forefathers.

# Conclusion

### We have positional righteousness that is ascribed to us in Christ (MI).

### A passage of Scripture has one proper meaning, but that correction interpretation can often be determined through seeing its eastern values.