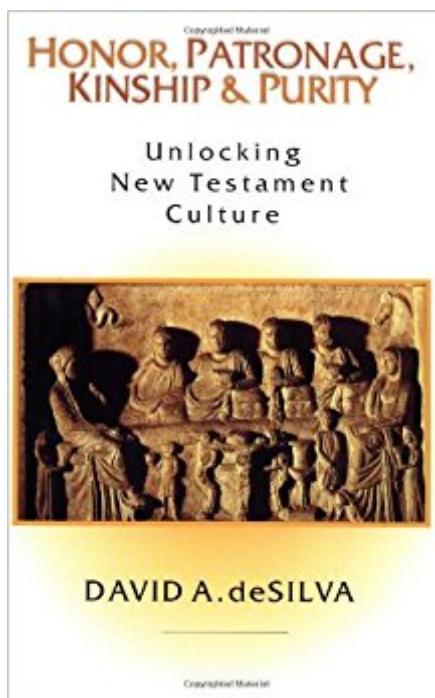


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Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture



Synopsis

Contemporary Western readers may find it surprising that honor and shame, patronage and reciprocity, kinship and family, and purity and pollution offer us keys to interpreting the New Testament. But as recent scholarship has proposed and as David deSilva demonstrates, paying attention to these cultural themes opens our eyes and ears to new discoveries and deeper understanding. Through our understanding of honor and shame in the Mediterranean world, we gain new appreciation of the way in which the personhood of early Christians connected with group values. By examining the protocols of patronage and reciprocity, we more firmly grasp the meaning of God's grace--and our response has fresh meaning. In exploring the ethos of kinship and household relations, we enlarge our perspective on the early Christian communities that met in houses and functioned as a new family or "household" of God. And by investigating the notions of purity and pollution along with their associated practices, we come to realize how the ancient "map" of society and the world was revised by the power of the gospel. DeSilva's work will reward you with a deeper appreciation of the New Testament, the gospel and Christian discipleship. More than that, it will also inform your participation in contemporary Christian community.

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Customer Reviews

"Chapter is the best discussion of the language of grace as patronage that I have ever encountered." -- Carolyn Osiek, Catholic Biblical Quarterly "His discussion of grace as a circle of giving and receiving that involves generosity, gift, and gratitude ... is particularly valuable." -- Ritva

Williams, Interpretation

David A. deSilva (Ph.D., Emory University) is Trustees' Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio and an ordained elder in the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. He is the author of over twenty books, including *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James, and Jude* (2012), *Global Readings: A Sri Lankan Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (2011), *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (2009), *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (2004), *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (2002), and *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (2000), as well as over one hundred journal articles and contributions to reference works and collections of essays.

As the title of the book suggests, this book focuses on four main aspects of New Testament culture. As the headline of my review suggests, this book provides an enormous wealth of information in so doing. Specifically, the author discusses concepts related to the importance of honor and avoiding shame, descriptions of patron/client relations, common attitudes towards kin versus outsiders, and the importance of maintaining cleanliness and avoiding pollution. The author is knowledgeable and draws from an extensive range of sources to thoroughly expound on the specified topics. While the writing is clear and easy enough to follow, the text is a bit academic in nature and should not be considered a light read. It was exciting for me, but I'm a nerd. There were a number of topics discussed within the text that I found particularly enjoyable. Understanding first century Palestinian societies as being "agonistic" in nature, utilizing a challenge-riposte approach when vying for social status, brought a lot of clarity to the gospel accounts of religious authorities challenging Jesus in public spaces. Likewise, understanding how patrons would show "grace" to their clients and the clients would, in turn, respond by being "faithful" provided a new perspective for understanding biblical concepts of grace and faith. I found it intriguing that many ancient cultures would view the idea of treating kin the same way as you treat outsiders to be outright reprehensible and shameful and it brings insight into how meaningful it was to consider fellow believers as family (fictive kinship). Considering purity laws as regulations supporting the orderly nature of things and the codified avoidance of what is seen as disorderly and out of place ("spit on the sidewalk," for example) was very interesting, as well. I found the content on

honor and shame to be particularly relevant to the current attitudinal climate concerning Christianity in the public square of the United States. Knowing the founders of my faith had to struggle against the current in their own culture, suffering slings and arrows of ridicule along the way, instills within me a sense of kinship with their hardships. In that sense, there is solidarity between us. When I suffer such ridicule, I can rest in the knowledge that I have not been alone in such suffering. In fact, being subjected to such shame should be in some sense normative for the Christian. This book is a delight and a gem. Reading it will provide greater insight into the culture and customs of second temple Judaism and first century Greco-Roman society, and how such customs are relevant to New Testament studies. If you're into that kind of thing, pick it up and give it a whirl.

Being required reading for class, I had to read through this one pretty quickly. However, this is one of the better resources for grasping a wide understanding of first century Greco-Roman and Jewish culture. DeSilva breaks the book up into four parts (Honor/Shame, Patronage/Client, Kinship, and Purity/Pollution). He systematically, rhythmically explores each topic as understood by the people groups at the time, how the New Testament speaks both FROM and INTO them, and how we can apply the understandings today in the modern 21st century church. My eyes were opened to much understanding that often goes beneath the surface "between the lines" in the words of the New Testament. Because of DeSilva's work, my understanding of Jesus Christ, his teachings, and his followers are on the verge of a deeper understanding. Cannot wait to go through the New Testament again after having read this one.

Without the social and cultural backgrounds of the 1st Century, a New Testament reader will miss out, misunderstand, and even misinterpret much of the New Testament. deSilva brings this much needed information to the foreground, which will help clarify the New Testament to the honest truth-seeker. I especially liked his clarification of the Grace-gift (Gr. charis), which is too often interpreted as a one-sided coin that is only dependent upon God, without any required and/or expected responses by the recipients of GRACE. Excellent book, highly recommended for the inductive Bible student.

This was one of the best books on the New Testament I have ever read. It was required in a seminary level New Testament survey course, and shed light on so many cultural dynamics at play in the biblical text. I highly recommend it!

One of my favorite books. I learned a great deal about grace that I did not know before.

This book is helpful to the aspiring biblical scholar and to the Christian layman. It situates the Bible firmly in its 1st Century mediterranean culture, first by exploring the contemporary texts, then examining the scriptures. At the end of the chapters dealing with scripture, he briefly writes on the practical applications of this knowledge, which is particularly useful. Some feel that he wrecks his book this way, by forcing 1st Century culture into the service of 21st century protestant evangelicalism. However, it is always presented as either a way to fulfill the Great Comission or how to apply the New Testament, a group of books nearly 2000 years old, to our modern lives. I recommend this above Bruce Malina's "The New Testament World" because of its clarity and practical application, although both are wonderfully informative.

DeSilva's anthropological study of four key cultural components of the first-century Mediterranean world - honor/shame, patron/client, kinship, and purity - is done well and is accessible. Further, he takes his study and applies it to New Testament scripture to give the reader a deeper understanding of the text as its original audience would have understood it and then applies this understanding to the present-day Christian and church. This would be a helpful book to any student of the Bible.

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