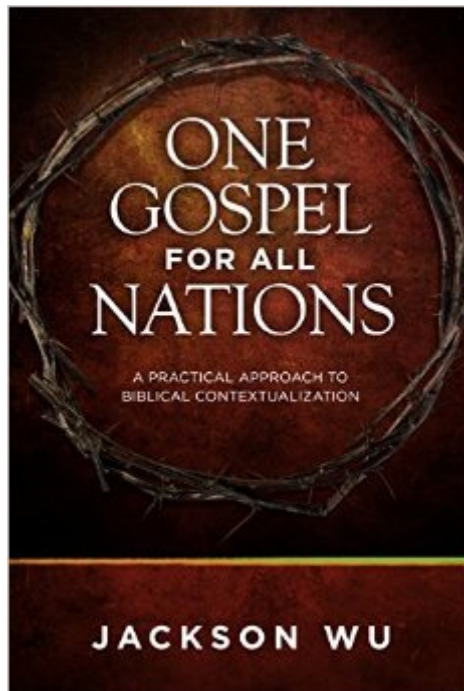


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One Gospel For All Nations*: A Practical Approach To Biblical Contextualization



Synopsis

The Bible tells us what to believe--the gospel. Did you know that it also shows how to contextualize the gospel? In *One Gospel for All Nations*, Jackson Wu does more than talk about principles. He gets practical. When the biblical writers explain the gospel, they consistently use a pattern that is both firm and flexible. Wu builds on this insight to demonstrate a model of contextualization that starts with interpretation and can be applied to any culture. In the process, he explains practically why we must not choose between the Bible and culture. Wu highlights various implications for both missionaries and theologians. Contextualization should be practical, not pragmatic; theological, not theoretical.

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Customer Reviews

Early on in his book, Jackson Wu asks, "Are we biblically faithful if our gospel message is not culturally meaningful?" This sets the tone for the entire book in three ways. First, Wu constantly refers back to the Bible and the overall testimony of Scripture as the foundation for how we understand the gospel of Jesus Christ; this challenges common evangelical assumptions which reduce the gospel to a series of propositions. Relatedly, Wu challenges the commonly understood idea that systematic theology is the apex of theology and Christian scholarship; he calls the reader to re-examine the primacy of "biblical theology" (and its more narrative emphasis) over and against systematic theology (and its more propositional emphasis). One result of this is that the gospel is understood more in the light of the Old Testament narrative, and more than as a series of propositions. He proves this from multiple Scripture passages which contain the words "gospel" / "good news". Second, Wu offers a practical alternative to contextualization by proposing a

systematic process; this is enormously important. Wu shows that contextualization is not simply an add-on for cross-cultural workers. No, contextualization actually begins with interpretation. I believe Wu's approach may represent a paradigm-shift for the way most Christians and pastors think about theology and the gospel. Wu demonstrates conclusively "the way we think and do theology is unwittingly influenced by our own cultural values. And the fact that this has largely gone unexamined in the world Christian movement implies an urgent need" both to be faithful to Scripture, and to share the gospel in a way that is truly relevant to the host culture.

Why wouldn't we as missions practitioners also want to become experts in Biblical theology and anthropology? Or, better put, how can we afford not to? As a practitioner, I devoured *One Gospel for all Nations* by Jackson Wu. Sometimes, it's difficult to know where to start in the process of contextualization. What Wu does, though, is demystify the cloudy understanding of what contextualization actually is, who should do it, and what the process should look like, moving from our understanding of Biblical Theology (and its flexible and firm components of the gospel message), to our understanding of our host culture, to looking at how the Bible intersects with our host culture (exegetical contextualization), and from there, developing a more systematic cultural contextualization. One of the chapters I found most helpful was his exegesis on Acts 17, showing how it was a presentation of a "Jewish" gospel. That chapter has stumped me (as far as takeaways for contextualization) for ages, as I would imagine has happened with many practitioners. We aren't just looking for one key to substitute, a single redemptive analogy, or a contextually appropriate way to do church. What we do, and hopefully the theologians who will be raised up by our work, is give a more balanced and holistic message of the Gospel to the world, as we look at how the Bible engages different cultures at different levels. If we don't understand what the Bible was originally trying to communicate, what our cultures underlying false gospel is, or how the Bible can address these issues, we have no hope of transforming the worldview (i.e. discipling) of nations.

Would you like to hear the good news of the Gospel? You would? Okay. Long ago our ancestors Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were banished from His presence. In order to bring us back, God sent His Son to us. He lived among us and died on a cross, but God raised Him from the dead and all who believe on Him can find forgiveness in His name. Such is the way that a Gospel presentation can usually go. Now of course, when presenting the story of the Bible, one cannot give a full presentation of everything in the Bible, but isn't it amazing how much is left out of this? Where is the history of Israel in this presentation? Does Israel have no purpose in God's story? Where is

the mention of Jesus being a king? You can see Him as savior, but will you see Him as King? Jackson Wu is a Chinese scholar who writes about how to interact with Scripture in a more practical way to present the Gospel to all nations. After all, such an approach might work fine here in America to an extent (And that extent is lessening), but go to a more Eastern mindset and you could find it less effective. Wu primarily shows his own people of China as a different culture that contrasts heavily with our modern Western culture. In doing so, Wu takes us back to Scripture and says we must look for the themes of covenant, creation, and kingdom. Whenever the Gospel is presented, we will find something of this there. You might not find all the themes, but you will find at least one of the themes. This means also that when we go to another culture, that we can see how they interact with Scripture and find grounds of agreement first. We can disagree with the Marxist ideologically for instance, but could we find something we can agree on? We can agree with the desire to find a perfect society together.

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