

Cross-Culture, Across Town, The Gospel in Fear/Power Culture, 2/21/21

The Great Commission calls every Christian into the mission work of making disciples of all people groups both as senders and as sent. God may be calling some of us to go to another culture as an ambassador of Christ. And we are also called to make disciples of the people groups in our midst. And to be effective we must better understand the different cultural perspectives.

Colossians 4:3-4

³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

One-eye illustration. Missiologists for many decades have summarized these cultural perspectives into three categories. Guilt/Innocence (The West), Shame/Honor (Middle East, Asia), Fear Power (Sub-Saharan Africa, South America, Pacific Islanders). These are generalities for the sake of clarity. All cultures have aspects of all three but these themes are prominent. Excellent short book **3D Gospel**.

Today we are going to get a crash course in **Fear/Power Culture (Title Slide)** and how to more effectively communicate the Gospel in this context. What is Fear/Power Culture? Well in many ways it could be summarized by the Apostle Paul's words in

Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,*

against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

For many western Christians, this Scripture may seem more conceptual, but for those in fear/power culture the spiritual world is just as real and experiential as the physical world. **Title Slide** FP cultures see the physical world as the battleground for the spiritual forces. This vulnerability to these powerful spiritual forces results in the prominent feeling of fear. They fear a potential misstep may open a vulnerable point for spiritual influence or expose them to harm — such as an accident, a bad dream, or even possession. The way to overcome fear is to gain power in the spiritual realm. **The goal then is to appease, avoid or control these spiritual powers for your benefit:** For health, security, authority, knowledge, long life and resources for you and your family. “To protect a vulnerable newborn baby from harm, parents may paint an image on her forehead to ward off spirits. To inflict revenge, an offended person may burn a picture of an enemy. To promote fertility, a couple may visit a holy mountain to pray.¹” **Morality:** While we may see life through right and wrong ethical standards and laws, **FP cultures see methods and techniques for spiritual protection as more important.** What works is what is right.

¹ 3D Gospel, Jayson Georges. pg.26

Some cultural comparisons:²

Job Skills: GI: Formal education, SH: apprentice through family connection, FP: Receive Sacred Knowledge.

Birthmark: GI: Harmless, Unique, SH: Embarrassing Blemish to hide, FP: Sign on Omen.

Offended Person: GI: Seek justice, SH: Revenge or Withdrawal, FP: Place a Curse.

Misdeeds: GI: internal conscience, SH: public reputation, FP: fate.

“Though the dynamics of fear and power are commonly associated with tribal shamans or Caribbean voodoo practitioners, they also influence a Brazilian businessman praying to a saint or a Washington politician consulting an astrologer.”³

Title Slide I have personally had a number of experiences in this cultural context. Experienced this culture in the mountains of Guatemala, on micro-islands in El Salvador and in the mountains of Eburru, Kenya where, Lord willing after the pandemic, we will take a church missions trip. On a missions trip to Haiti, I encountered a former voodoo priest who came to Christ. It is said of Haiti that it is 45% Christian, 55% Catholic and 95% Voodoo. Very syncretistic. Many from Caribbean descent in America. I have also experienced fear/power dynamics right here in America- working with a Philippine immigrant who asked if I would come pray away the dark powers in his apartment where there were spells cast. Power encounters with demonic activity and with several congregants who came out of practicing the occult and witchcraft. Make no mistake- FP culture exists in the Amazon jungle and in bedrooms of teenagers, college dorms and gated communities.

Meet Sarah...Ouija boards, séances, hypnotism, and spells were all part of Sarah's experience growing up. At a young age, Sarah was introduced to witchcraft by her father who taught her that she had special powers and was called to follow in his footsteps by pursuing witchcraft. When she was 13, Sarah's father handed her an old hardcover book of witchcraft from a basement bookshelf, initiating Sarah into the occult. As a young teenager, Sarah began exploring witchcraft on her own by reading books on spells and buying crystals and incense. By high school, witchcraft was an integrated part of her life. Sarah set up an altar in her room, routinely invited spirits to guide her, and cast spells to change circumstances in her life. But as time went on, things turned dangerous. At the end of her senior year, Sarah felt a spirit was telling her that her only chance at a new life was to take her own life as a sacrifice. So Sarah attempted to commit suicide. Sarah drove her car, waiting for it to fill with leaked carbon monoxide. The next thing she knew she woke up lying on the ground next to her car, where she breathed in enough fresh air to survive...we will revisit Sarah's story at the end of the message.

² Ibid, pg.30

³ Ibid, pg.25

Friends, people like Sarah in FP cultures need to know the power and love of God for them. So what might it sound like to share the **salvation story** of the Bible?

In the beginning, the creator God made the world by His powerful word and he has absolute power over the heavens and the earth. God appointed humanity to rule His world under His power. At some point in eternity past, a host of spiritual angels rebelled against God's sovereign rule. A powerful spiritual being, Satan, led the mutiny. Satan schemed to expand his illegitimate power over the earth by bringing humanity under his rule. Satan wooed Adam and Eve out from God's kingdom of light into his domain of darkness. Adam's race lost its position of power and authority in the world. Since then all people are born into spiritual darkness. People's eyes are blinded and hearts are captured by Him. Sin, spiritual attack, and idolatry enslave human souls. But God's sovereign plan is to reclaim His dominion. The story of the Old Testament is God working through His kingdom servants to display His love, power and truth over the false gods of the nations. Through Israel's kingly line, He brought the mighty warrior, Jesus who is God in human flesh. Unlike Adam, Jesus resisted Satan's schemes and remained committed to God's mission of dismantling Satan's kingdom. Jesus delivered people held captive by Satan by healing the sick, casting out demons, controlling nature and speaking with the authority of God. The evil forces of Satan thought killing Jesus would solidify their authority in the world. But their plan backfired. **Hebrews 2:14-15** *he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—*

¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Then in the ultimate display of divine power, God resurrected Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead. **Ephesians 1:19-21** *That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,*

²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. So how do we respond to this good news? We must turn from the counterfeit powers of Satan and to the true ruler, Jesus. **Colossians 1:13** *He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.* No longer do we need to live in fear. **1 John 4:18** *Perfect love casts out fear.* The Spirit of Jesus Christ now comes to live in us and empower us. **Ephesians 6:13-17**— He gives us the armor to resist against the schemes of the enemy. We do not need to fear death because those who belong to the kingdom of light, even when they die, will live. The battle concludes when God finally destroys Satan and his forces and then rules the world from His throne for all eternity with his people.

Christian Concepts:⁴

Sin: GI: Breaking Divine Law, SH: Dishonor FP: Idolatry.

Our Main Problem: GI: Total Depravity, SH: Unacceptable, FP: Utter Vulnerability

⁴ Ibid, pg. 54

Consequences of Sin: GI: Judgment, SH: Disgrace, FP: Bondage,

False Hope: GI: Morality, Works, SH: Identify with Honorable Community, FP: Rituals and secrets.

Christ: GI: Substitute for sin, SH: Reconciler, FP: Conqueror and Liberator

Grace: GI: Overcomes Guilt, Sinfulness SH: Overcomes Shame, Worthlessness, FP: Overcomes Weakness and Strongholds.

The primary instruments of evangelism are the Word of God, the Spirit of God, supernatural love and prayer.

Title Slide Sarah's Story Continued: After her near-death experience, Sarah continued on a destructive trajectory. The summer before she left for college, Sarah moved out of her parents' house and into a boarding house. She drank every day and prayed to spirits on the beach every night. Having failed a second suicide attempt, Sarah began looking to college as a potential solution to her problems. That fall, Sarah left for Mary Washington College with hope for what her new life at college would bring.

When she arrived on campus, Sarah was placed in a room with two other girls, Kim and Stacy. Not long after meeting them, Sarah decided they were strange. For one, they had Bibles. And not only did they own them, they always seemed to be reading and bringing them wherever they went. "That was the weirdest thing in all my life," Sarah later said. Early in the school year, Kim and Stacy started hosting their freshmen InterVarsity Bible study in the dorm room, where the group would sit in a circle on the floor... and instead of a séance in darkness, they discussed the Bible in the light.

And then one week, Sarah stuck around for Bible study. She kept a safe distance from the discussion circle, but she listened while pretending to study. Sarah didn't understand anything that was being said, and yet she was fascinated. "All I knew was that those people had something I didn't. I was seeing peace in their life. There was absolutely no peace in my life, but they had true peace." Intrigued more and more by her roommates, Sarah finally agreed to attend an InterVarsity event right before Thanksgiving break.

At the InterVarsity meeting Sarah listened to a visiting pastor speak about biblical sacrifices. It became clear that her sacrifices and altars were a perversion of something much greater. Suicide was an evil counterfeit to the true sacrifice. God was asking her to lay down her life as a living sacrifice because he loved her, and in laying down her life, Sarah could have the new life she had been searching for. The message was entirely different than anything Sarah had heard before – this God cared about her and wanted her to know him. Moved by the message, she found a quiet place outside, knelt in the grass, and prayed. After that night, Sarah never turned to witchcraft again. She destroyed all her charms, crystals and books on witchcraft. Sarah said: "It was me putting a stake in the ground, saying 'I don't belong to that world anymore.'" Since

then, Sarah has written books and God has used her to reach many students for Christ.⁵ Whether in the jungles of the Amazon or in the dorm of a college- The light of the Gospel needs to be shared to those shackled by the dominion of darkness.

Takeaways:

Maybe you don't really believe in demons and the supernatural stuff... after all, you may say, "I've never seen a bed levitate or someone's head spin around like in the movies, so it mustn't be real." May I remind you of how clever our adversary is? *The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist.*⁶ If he can get our western world to feel so rational and natural- everything explained away by science and psychology then He can lull us into a sleepy spiritual blindness. *C.S. Lewis Screwtape Letters*-We won't pray, we won't expect to see God move powerfully, we won't think we are in a spiritual battle so we won't put on the armor of God, we won't see our subtle addictions as spiritual strongholds of the enemy in our lives...Make no mistake, Satan and his hordes are alive and well and more engaged in our everyday lives than you know. But Christ is greater!

Marvel at the 3D gospel! "The gospel addresses shame by telling how Christ was shamed on our behalf to restore our honor. The gospel addresses fear by telling how Christ has defeated every power and how he even gives his power to us. And the gospel addresses guilt by assuring us that Christ took our guilt upon himself so he could give us his innocence. The gospel removes shame, it removes fear, and it removes guilt, it restores honor, it restores power, it restores innocence. The gospel speaks to every person in every culture and addresses their every need."⁷

Lunch and Learn: 3D Gospel. Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm on Zoom.

⁵ <https://intervarsity.org/news/i-was-once-witch>

⁶ Line from *The Usual Suspects*, Verbal.

⁷ <https://www.challies.com/articles/shame-fear-guilt/>