



BRING GOOD NEWS!

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, October 23, 2022

Among all human beings, and the cultures in which they live, we may recognize three fundamental, yet negative, driving motivations: guilt, shame, fear.

One or more of these three drive each of us to seek help, answers, rescue, and healing for our lives.

We can see all three at work in the Bible, beginning with Adam and Eve:

Gen 3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

¹¹ And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Right and wrong were internalized in their consciences, and they felt guilty. They also felt unworthy and embarrassed, and hid themselves. What's more, they sensed something was wrong with themselves, not just their actions.

So, the Bible illustrates this breakdown in a series of three national tragedies that emphasized each of these three issues, and continue to serve as illustrations of our needs and how God works with us, even in succeeding generations:

- Ejection from the Garden of Eden – Guilt (shame, fear)
- Enslavement in Egypt – Fear (shame, guilt)
- Exile from Jerusalem – Shame (guilt, fear)

Good News!

Come to the New Testament, and the Gospel message, which Paul described to the Ephesians as “*the unfathomable riches of Christ*,” answers all three primal needs:

Guilt is erased by Forgiveness.

Eph 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

Eph 2:5 [God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

Fear is dispelled by Power.

Eph 1: 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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 title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

Shame is covered with Honor.

Eph 1:5 In love [God] predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ.

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Eph 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.

Probably, all of us are familiar with each of these issues, but, based on the culture in which we have been raised, we tend to have one primary perspective and concern.

Guilt-Forgiveness Cultures

Those cultures that are most concerned with guilt are often prompted by rational thought, and answer the need with laws to deter or punish the guilty. The notions of right and wrong are foundational pillars in guilt-forgiveness cultures. Guilt-oriented cultures don’t simply emphasize rules and laws that define acceptable behavior, but they socialize people to internalize those codes of conduct (think of traffic lane dividers and stop signs— isn’t it amazing how many people actually observe them?).

Guilt needs no audience. The result is an individualistic system for strongly individualistic people, that is rooted in actions and behaviors. Consequently, guilt-based thinking is all about “doing.” (What did you do? What did you fail to do? What will you do about it?) Sin is largely the false attempt to expiate guilt and fabricate peace.

Guilt-driven people ask, “How can my sins be forgiven to be assured of peace with God?”

The answer: Jesus’ death bears the punishment for our moral transgressions, satisfies the demand of justice, and purchases our pardon.

Fear-Power Cultures

Those cultures that are most concerned with fear are usually driven by the power of the will, answering fear and superstition with acts of power, coercion, or oppression.

Ethical standards are regarded as optional, and may be supplanted by any acceptable technique for appeasing or manipulating the unseen forces of the world to gain favor. Fear-power cultures live in constant fear of invisible powers, never knowing what capricious evil the spirits might inflict. Sin is largely the false attempt to conquer fear and fabricate freedom.

Fear-driven people ask, “How can I access power to gain safety and control of my life?”

The answer: Jesus’ death defeats the spirits and powers of darkness and liberates their captives.

Shame-Honor Cultures

Those cultures that are most concerned with shame are usually stimulated by emotions, and share a strong group- or community-orientation, and answer their shame with rituals of saving face and celebrating achievements. Honor comes from relationships; shame is a negative public rating that isolates.

Members of shame-honor cultures are expected to be sensitive to the social roles they must play, and preserve the status of the group, often at the expense of their own personal desires. Group-oriented cultures value relational harmony and keeping the peace, even at the expense of truth or justice, for morality is defined relationally, not legally or abstractly. Sin is largely the false attempt to cover shame and fabricate honor.

Removing shame requires more than forgiveness. While guilt says, “I made a mistake”; shame says, “I am a mistake.” Rejection and isolation are the results.

Shame-driven people ask, “How can I become a part of the community and win their respect?”

The answer: Jesus’ death covers our “nakedness,” removes our shame, and restores face/dignity/honor in God’s sight.

The Gospel Palette

These three dynamics are like the three basic colors from which artists create thousands of colors. They are true not only of large-scale cultures like people groups and nations, but also of nuclear families and small-scale societies.

So, within a local church as diverse as ours, it is likely that you will meet three different people, each driven by one of these three core needs, and each seeking a different answer from the same Gospel.

Let me introduce you to...

You may meet a man named Guilt E. George, whose grave concern (motivation) is the guilt created by disobedience (his and others'), and whose great joy is the free and full forgiveness offered through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Or you may speak with a young student, named Tim Idboy, whose life has been a harrowing experience of pressure and intimidation, but has found in the Savior Jesus the love that drives out fear and grants freedom and authority to prosper.

You may also find a woman named A. Shamed Sabrina, who has born a great deal of shame for her sinful past, and whose delight is the message about the esteem and honor God has for His children, to whom He has given His own name.

People like each of them make up the body of Christ, as well as the world around us. Each needs the Gospel, but each with a different slant to its presentation.

Multi-faceted Freedom

The Gospel of Jesus Christ addresses all three needs, but *will you* share it in the way that each one needs?

People often show others the Gospel through the wrong lens—offering forgiveness when honor is the need they crave, or addressing moral guilt when superstitious fear is driving them crazy.

Will you recognize the primary need (guilt, shame, or fear) that drives the person you are speaking with, and share the Good News message appropriately?

Three Cultural Perspectives

American culture, for the first 200 years, has been mostly guilt-based, and oriented to law-abiding behaviors, and we have learned to share the Gospel accordingly—confirming guiltiness with the laws of the Bible and offering forgiveness through the cross of Christ. We are happy to tell people that God looks past our guiltiness, calling us righteous in His eyes, and treating us as though we were innocent.

However, another large part of the world is fear-based, suffering for generations from oppression and slavery of some kind, fearing most for their own daily survival. They need to know that God sees them and will drive out their fear, replacing it with peace and granting them righteous authority to make a positive difference in the world, and ultimately overthrow their oppressors.

Yet a still larger world population is shame-based, for whom guilt is relative and following rules is secondary; saving face and preserving dignity are uppermost. They need to know that God recognizes their shame and answers it with His saving presence and His faithful love. God looks past their shame and humiliation; instead of treating them as outcasts, He welcomes them as family and honors them with responsibility in His Kingdom.

Context is Everything

These three strands of the gospel never function in isolation, but the driving forces of a particular culture may warrant an emphasis on one approach above others.

We should be able to recognize each of these moral forces and practice three *contextualized approaches* of Christian witness: meeting guilt with truth encounters, fear with power encounters, and shame with community encounters.

People struggling with guilt need to hear “courtroom language”—like, law, transgression, judgment, condemnation, innocence, penalty, sacrifice, forgiveness, guilt, works.

Peoples struggling with fear need to hear “combat language”—like, deliverance, healing, bondage, authority, darkness, signs, wonders, miracles, peace, power, oppression, warfare, spirits, angels, blessing, protection, freedom.

Peoples struggling with shame need to hear “community language”—like, loyalty, mediator, father, child, community, harmony, unity, inclusion, worth, identity, acceptance, worthy, glory, inheritance, adoption.

How you and I understand God’s mission to those we serve (i.e., pardoning the guilty, delivering the fearful, or welcoming the shamed) will shape our strategy for Christian ministry.

If you'd like to know more about this subject, and develop your own awareness of these three perspectives and how the Gospel addresses each, so you can become more effective in sharing your faith with others, I urge you to read Jayson Georges' book, [The 3D Gospel](#), which was recommended to me by our recent missionary guest, Eric Dueck. It is a fairly quick read, full of good information, and practical help.

Toward the end of the small book, Georges gives three examples of a Gospel presentation, each slanted toward one of these cultural perspectives. I'm sure you will find these helpful in putting it all together in language you can learn to use.

If you'd like a copy of the paperback, ask me. If I have some left, I'll be delighted to give you one.

Now, go and tell the world about Jesus!