BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE 3D GOSPEL

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The gospel is richer and more all-encompassing than our social frameworks, but most of us are not able to think outside of the mind-set that we grew up with. This book will help you do just that.
Category: Observations

Thirty years or so ago, I wrote a short article that explored the way in which Kouya people responded to the gospel. They didn't repent of their sins and trust in divine grace for forgiveness in the way that I assumed was necessary. In fact, according to the way in which I had been taught and understood Christianity, they didn't seem to have become believers at all. But, they made a clear shift in allegiance from darkness to light. In a society such as theirs, to burn all of their charms, and to trust in Jesus alone to protect them was a demonstration of faith that would put most western conservative evangelicals to shame.

The problem, though I didn't know it at the time was that I lacked a biblical understanding of the breadth of the gospel and the theological language to describe a culture very different from my own. If only, I'd read The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear CulturesÂ at the time. I'd have had a much better idea of what was going on.

This is a short paperback of 80 pages which will cost you about five pounds and much less for the Kindle version (though as it has lots of tables, I'd be tempted to go for paper). It is pitched at a popular audience and it is absolutely excellent.

The central thesis of the book is that there are three lenses through which people tend to approach the human condition; guilt-innocence, shame-honour and fear-power.

> *(1) Guilt-innocence cultures are individualistic societies (mostly Western), where people who break the laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong,(2) shame-honour cultures describe collectivist cultures (common in the East), where people are shamed for fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honour before the community, and (3) fear-power cultures refers to animalistic contexts, where people afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals.*

Each of these tends to condition the way in which people relate in society and crucially how they tend to approach the gospel. In the West, we have lived in a guilt-innocence culture and this shapes the way in which we understand and present the Christian message. We focus on the guilt due to sin and the fact that we can be forgiven because Jesus was punished in our place on the cross. Coming from where we come from, with our understanding of human nature, thisÂ *is* the gospel. The problem is that this message (true as it is), does not resonate with people from shame-honour or fear-power cultures. Nor, does this position do full justice to the record of Scripture. In the opening chapter, the book shows the way in which Ephesians addresses each type of culture:



Guilt-Innocence: "In him, we have redemption through his blood, the *forgiveness* of sins"

Shame-Honour: "In love, he predestined us to be *adopted* as his *sons* through Jesus Christ"

Fear-Power: Â "That *power* is like the working of his *mighty* strength which he exerted in Christ..."

The book is more nuanced than this summary would indicate. The different types of culture are points on a continuum and no people group is one hundred per cent one or the other. However, the guidelines work well. Â The book is chock full of tables and comparisons which show how the different cultures work and outlining different Bible themes and stories which are applicable in each situation.

This is a short book and it doesn't cover anything in detail but as an introduction to a subject which is foreign (quite literally) to most British Christians, it is a great place to start. Who should read it? Anyone who is seeking to minister cross-culturally and who has not studied this subject previously should think about reading it. If you are going to minister in, say, Africa or Asia, you will want to read more detailed works, too, but this is a great starting point. Given that there is evidence that post-

Christian Britain is moving away from a guilt-innocence framework, towards a shame-honour one, I would also suggest that anyone who is concerned for evangelising the UK might want to give it a go, too.

The point is, the gospel is richer and more all-encompassing than our social frameworks, but most of us are not able to think outside of the mind-set that we grew up with. This book will help you do just that.