Understanding Your Friend's Cultural Operating System

Goal

Distinguish between honor/shame, guilt/innocence, and fear/power worldviews

Introduction

In *Honor and Shame*, Roland Muller identified three primary worldviews: fear-power, guilt-innocence, and honor-shame. These are the major cultural operating systems around the world. In fear-power cultures, people are constantly thinking about power dynamics. How can my power be increased? What people, living or dead, must I be close to in order to increase my power—financially, socially, and spiritually? Is there persistent fear about offending a powerful leader, ancestor, or god? **Fear says, "I am weak, so I should acquire power or align with powerful people before I get hurt."** This worldview is prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Guilt-innocence cultures tend to be areas impacted by the Greco-Roman worldview and the Protestant Reformation. This operating system, prevalent in Europe and North America, tends to view things from the perspective of a courtroom. It is especially prominent in individualistic cultures. **Guilt says "I did wrong, so I should confess and make restitution before I get punished."** Guilt is alleviated through acknowledgment or punishment.

In collectivistic cultures, however, behavior is often regulated by honor and shame. The main relational motivator is avoiding disgrace and maintaining harmony. Life is maintaining and attaining honor in one's community. Honor-shame is especially prevalent in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In fact, 65% of the world's population and 90% of the unreached people groups are in honor-shame contexts. In these cultures, people feel shame when they violate the community's expectations. **Shame says, "I did something dishonorable, so I should cover or hide it before I get exposed."** Shame is removed by other people. The person shamed can be restored by someone with more honor to be re-incorporated into the community.

Which cultural operating system seems most familiar to you?

Bible Passage & Questions

Acts 26:14-18

Put this passage in your own words.

Which cultural operating systems does Jesus address in verse 18?

Consider & Discuss

- How do we identify the primary cultural operating system of our international friend?

- What percentage of the internationals in your ministry are from honor/shame, guilt/innocence, and fear/power cultures?

- What cultural operating system does your ministry team seem to be most effective in ministering to? Why?

Next Steps (Individually & Collectively)

Watch "What are Honor/Shame and Guilt/Innocence Cultures?" and "Is it Biblical to Talk About Honor Shame Cultures?" in the GodTools channel on YouTube.

Additional Resources

Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (2014)

Roland Muller, *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Xlibris, 2001)

Honorshame.com

Perspective Cards

"I Am From" Cultural Conversation Cards