

## CULTURAL CONFLICTS— *where we got it wrong*

[~editorial series: # 2]

### THE GOSPEL: GOOD NEWS IN LIMBO

Sadly, Christians in North America have lost their own sense of the Gospel to a truncated, abbreviated, simplistic version that hangs in limbo with slight connection to history, Scripture, or the world's perception of the Christian faith. It's not even a good marketing-tool to anyone unfamiliar with Christian concepts, culture, or jargon.

This is not a self-aggrandizing, arrogant declaration. It is a culmination of the responses and blank-looks of people who tell me of well-meaning Christians who have tried to lead them to Christ. They report that the language being used is foreign to their everyday exchanges; concepts like "needing a savior," being "lost," and the threat of separation from God for eternity, have no context or relevance to their lives.

The problem is not that the gospel is no longer applicable, but that our assumptions underlying the context for the gospel are no longer valid. What assumptions?

1. People no longer share a common definition of "god."
2. Our culture no longer has a memory of Christian beliefs, practices, or language patterns.
3. The very idea of "religion" is now optional to a person's belief system (if they a *system* at all).
4. The thought of "*needing a savior*" implies so much about the state of humanity that is now lost to the postChristian mindset.

The basic Christian message, the Gospel, needs to be **re-contextualized** for the postChristian frame of mind. Follow this running mental-mind bender—

*Why do I need salvation?*

To be forgiven.

*Why do I need forgiveness?*

To spend eternity with God.

*Why would I want to do that?*

To avoid hell.

*What's wrong with hell? Besides, you have no proof of anything..., heaven OR hell. [See the quagmire in this approach? Now let's try another one— ]*

*Why do I need salvation?*

It's not that simple. You need to reconnect with the God who made you if you want true fulfillment in life.

*What are you talking about?*

God designed us to be in relationship with people and with Him. If we only maintain a horizontal relationship

then we are missing out on half of what it means to be human. Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to reconnect to His Father, the God who made us.

*What about the sin thing?*

Sin is the name God gives to things that take us out of His perimeter of protection. The Law was given so we would know where that perimeter of safety lies. If we cross that line of safety we put our lives at risk, literally. When we continue to cross those perimeters of

protection, we die, spiritually and literally.

*So Christianity is about being safe more than just about solving the sin problem?*

Almost, but more than that. It's about reconnecting to the God who made you, Jesus Christ, so you can become a fulfilled person..., the way He designed you to be!

The context for salvation is found in creation. For God intended that we live in a healthy relationship with Him and in healed, healthy relationships with each other— *that* is what it means to be **fully human**. Fulfilled. Forgiven. Complete. Solving the sin problem is the means-to-an-end, not the end in itself. To make the Gospel simply about solving the sin problem so someone can avoid hell is to miss the point entirely.

Communicating "true-Truth" in a postChristian society is no simple matter. Because of shifting assumptions about the nature of reality and a complete loss of any Christian perspective it takes a lot more savvy and effort to explain the Christian message today. Get used to it. *We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto.*



## SHIFT Tips

~culture clues that click

[Vol. 8, # 1]

1. Relationships take work.
2. Always be the first to say *I'm sorry*; at least for **how** the argument was handled.
3. Admit wrong. You did not *mis-speak*: you lied.
4. Work at rebuilding bridges; no one else will..., until you start.
5. Give your critics 50%. Learn through their eyes.

## SHIFTING GEARS — SAME RACE..., NEW STRATEGY

Some things don't feel the same way they used to, do they? Same vacation spot as last year, & the year before that. Maybe the kids are just older..., teenagers. Garden is the same size as last year, & the year before that. It just hurts more to till it this year. My job is still fulfilling..., isn't it?! Do you ever ask these questions? Well, so do we.

We're finding life needs to become more focused as we move into a new phase of NEED's ministry that we could not have foreseen. Why? It's hard to know the effects of *aging* (there, I've said the evil word) will have upon you until you get there. Not that we have nothing left to give— far from it. Our course offerings have solidified into a core (as much as anything can solidify around *NEEDinc*), our counseling services are finally moderated to a manageable level, and my writing schedule is coming under some degree of regularity.

For me, personally, at this writing at least, ministry, counseling, writing, creating, and caring have all become a question of *stamina*. I am in a constant battle with my body to support the processes of my mind and spirit. Yes, I have just reignited the Olympic torch of exercise in my life due to threats of both my wife Starr and evil assistant Melanie. Melanie threatened to quit; Starr threatened to die first. Thus, daily power walks are resurrected.

The RACE is on! To complete Paradigm Lost; to get six courses in DVD/YouTube presentation formats, and to mentor at least 2 key individuals who will take on the mantle of *NEEDinc*, even though, most likely, under a different moniker. All this, in the midst of ongoing ministry to a wonderfully secular, clueless4Christ Amherst!

Our RACE is the same, but our strategy has to be adapted, just like our message, to fit the changing perimeters of our life situation. We all grow and change throughout the various phases of our lives. Starr and I are definitely in new, unfamiliar-waters with this shift in energy levels. So our strategy to finish the RACE is shifting.

And yes, we do need your reflections, input, & prayers.

### NEEDNEWS & emPulse

To come in line with the economic downturn we would prefer to send you NEEDNEWS the same way you receive emPulse; that is, via the Internet.

Every snailmail NEEDNEWS we send you costs us about a \$1.10. Whereas a PDF version costs us nothing; it costs you, if you so chose, 1-2 sheets of paper.

We want to be honorable with every gift sent to fund this ministry, so, please, ASK to receive NEEDNEWS via email. Write [melanie@needinc.org](mailto:melanie@needinc.org). Thanks!

## SPRING HAS SPRING — new life, allergies, dreams, and adjusting to a new paradigm

It wasn't until 5 years ago that I experienced my first seasonal allergy attack. Since then, every Spring has been a battle to breathe. Starr has seemed to avoid the worst of it; her reaction to death-spores is not as severe as mine. Of course, developing a case of bronchitis didn't help.

Nonetheless, Spring also carries grey, and the beginning of sunny days and of Winter, Spring lifts my heart and spirit again!

Starr is back in her garden, pre-for..., I don't know— the car. It got clut-cozy place to bed down. We're both clean-raking debris left behind from winter's fury.

We just shipped our '96 Volvo out to Josh in Colorado Springs. Yes, in perfect running order. My mom, Florence, turned 95 on March 16th. Overall, she is doing quite well. And Bethany and Jeff (Costigan) made us grandparents again on January 30th, with the arrival of James Robert onto our planet! Man that kid can eat!

What can I say?! God is good! He is good..., all the time ☺!

Honor God, honor people, make a difference,

*Gary & Starr*



*Precambrian Humans unearthed!?!*

the warmth of hope for Summer, the end of Winter's brisk nights. And, although I do love the clear blue air almost as much. It's time for things to come alive

paring it for planting. I am in the garage, preparing it tered up over winter and I like my baby to have a safe, ing up the yard, planting grass seed, spreading mulch, We like working together!

(with 219, 947 miles on it)

### NEEDNEWS

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