

Cross-Cultural Perspectives



Culprits of Cross-cultural Relationships and Communication

Beware of three culprits to cross-cultural relationships and communications. Guard against them. Refuse to fall prey to them. Remember, it's a daily battle.

The first culprit is "**ethnocentrism.**" It's the feeling or belief that one's culture is superior to another. It is a sad situation in life when we think that everything we do is best, the way it must be done, and wonder why others don't have the brains enough to do it our way.

The *New World Encyclopedia* states that "research has revealed ethnocentrism in every culture around the world, based on a number of reasons, including religion, language, customs, culture, and shared history. It seems natural that people feel pride in the culture in which they have grown up and from which they have adopted their values and standards of behavior. However, the problem is that one may view other cultures not only as different, but also as inferior, with a great danger of behaving in ways that are damaging to those from other cultures."

Ethnocentrism ranks people according to what we feel they are worth. It can probably be easily identified by analyzing statements comparing "us" and "them." Here is a simple example: in some countries we refer to "them" as driving "on the wrong side of the road" instead of saying "opposite side." We must safeguard against always looking at the world through the eyes of one's own culture.

David Hesselgrave in *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* describes ethnocentrism as an attitude, held by almost all of the world's people, that says, "The way we think, feel, and behave is 'the way to think, feel, and behave.' It is '*the way*,' not '*a way*.'"

"**Stereotyping**" comes from the printing plates of old. The same image was reproduced over and over. It has evolved into a term that refers to a fixed impression of a certain group of people from which

positive or negative judgments are made. Stereotyping misleads people into thinking that all people in a certain culture are the same; cookie-cutters or carbon copies of each other. This ignores the uniqueness of individuals.

That leads us to the third culprit which is “**prejudice.**” It is the feeling derived from making pre-judgments; judgments before knowing the facts. Prejudice is seldom based on fact. It has been so destructive throughout history.

Recognizing these culprits is the first step in eliminating them. In order for there to be healthy cross-cultural relationships and communications these enemies must be identified, dealt with, and annihilated. Crossing cultures and all of its barriers is never easy. We do not need the added barriers of ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice to obstruct us in reaching the world or the corner of the world where we are called.