

Hospitality

Biblical Principles

As we consider the topic of hospitality, we are faced with an important question, “How does hospitality relate to the mission of God?” Oftentimes, we hear people speak of hospitality as virtue, a sort of “good thing” to do as a Christian. In other instances, we see it largely forgotten by the Christian community and relegated to the participation of only those who are uniquely “gifted” in it. Neither of these options accurately represent the biblical view.

Hospitality And Mission

Matthew 28:18-20

When we consider the Great Commission and the life that Jesus calls us into, we do not see hospitality explicitly mentioned. We do, however, see hospitality mentioned and modeled throughout the New Testament when we look at the church living on mission for God. So, our initial challenge is to rectify this by considering what place hospitality holds in the commission of Jesus. Categorizing this practical area of ministry life into the mission of God helps us to embrace it properly with a focus on why God commands us into it.

The commission of Jesus was his invitation to us to take up our place in the mission of God for humanity for this period of time in which we live. This mission is to make disciples (restored image bearers) through the primary means of going, baptism, and teaching. Involvement in each of these means is necessary to insure that our missional efforts are complete and balanced as we participate in God’s mission. All of these means are not only important because of effectiveness, but also for modeling. Together, these three model God to those we are discipling. In other words, how we embrace mission communicates something of God to those we are discipling because it is HIS mission.

In the context of these three means of the commission of Jesus, we understand hospitality to fit into the area of “baptism.” In looking at the meaning of the word baptism, we have concluded that the translation of this term is better understood as “immersion.” This translation is more faithful to the syntax and original intent of the context in which Jesus spoke it. Specifically, Jesus was communicating that we are to make disciples through an immersion into the Trinity. People are immersed, then, into the Trinity as we represent the Trinity in three simple ways:

1. Who does it (community)
2. What we say (word of Truth)

3. What we do (deeds of love)

Hospitality's connection to this is simple, yet profound: **Hospitality provides the framework through which we represent the Trinity to people.** Within this framework, people come in contact with the community of God. They observe and experience deeds of love and engage in meaningful discussions to understand and apply the Word of Truth.

Hospitality is the best human context to tangibly demonstrate the character of the Triune God and how He desires to connect with people. Hospitality gives us the means for immersing people into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Imaging God

Romans 15:1-16, Isaiah 25:6, Revelation 3:20, Revelation 19:9

Romans chapter fifteen provides for us an informative passage where we see the intent of hospitality demonstrated. In it, Paul clearly connects the charge to the church to “welcome others in” with the mission of God in reaching the Gentiles. Note the transition from verse 7 to verse 8; Paul supports the idea of welcoming others in (hospitality) with the example of Jesus in humbling himself for the sake of reaching the Gentiles. This tells us that genuine hospitality demonstrates the character of Jesus in reaching people.

When we look at God, we see this commitment that He has to us as His image bearers. We were uniquely created like Him, to find security and significance in and with Him. We were also created to spread His image throughout the earth, filling it with His goodness as we represent His life and character to the world. We are to “image” Him in all that we do.

In order to accurately “image” God to others, we must consider who He is and what He does. This is most clearly understood in the gospel. Before unveiling this, let's consider humanity's original design. In simple terms, people were designed for a familial relationship with God, finding home in a deep tangible expression of life with Him through feasting with Him (security)¹ and participating in the work that He assigned (significance). Because of sin, this design was broken and God began the process of restoring humanity back to it. Now, in the gospel, we see God going to the most extreme measures to bring us back into His family. Through the feasts of Israel, God welcomed them back into experiencing His desire to restore them to “home” with Him. Through communion now and the great feasts foretold about our future, God does the same with us in and through His church.

Simply stated, to be image bearers of God is to functionally find 1) **security** with God around family and food, and 2) **significance** with God by cooperating with Him in His work. This is the most basic representation of who we are as His image bears. It is our home.

Understanding this basic premise enables us to see the reason for the charge to be hospitable. In this most simple way, we welcome other image bearers into the presence of God's character by offering them “home” with us, ultimately leading them to “home” with Him. Without welcoming others into our homes, sharing food and life with them, we inadvertently misrepresent our great God to them. They may

¹ Feasting here indicates spending time with God around food and conversation in order to learn from Him and to confirm His love for Adam and Eve.

improperly view Him as a distant rule monger or a law enforcer rather than a loving Father who desperately wants them back in HIS home, sharing life and feasting on His goodness.

On another very practical note, when we consider the sheer number of times that God designates major events/interactions with people by using food, we begin to uncover this principle that sharing food with someone is demonstration of “home” and is a deep connecting platform for sharing life and purpose. Consider the following examples.

Feasts In The Jewish calendar

These feasts feature a number of foci, but the universal theme among them all was that God was instituting planned “family meals/celebrations” that were intended to reestablish the connection of the Jews with God.

Communion

The institution of communion is significant because it marks the only commanded ritual for the Church Age. By “ritual,” we simply mean a regular practice that is to be performed. Oddly enough, mankind has redefined the term “ritual” in very negative terms by adding a religious emphasis that was never intended by God. Jesus was merely stating that, to be His people and represent Him to the world, we must be committed to normal, regular, family gatherings around food in which we should take the opportunity to remember Him in it. He is, after all, the “head of our family.”

Marking Our Future Restoration

Isaiah 25:6, Revelation 3:20, and Revelation 19:9 each give us a rich picture of the future time when God will ultimately and finally restore all things to how He intended them to be. We do not believe that each of these feast references (that either trigger or celebrate our final restoration) are mere allegories. We believe that God expresses His love and purpose to us through deep familial life expressions, namely feasting and sharing food together. It is no coincidence that God does this with us because it is both who He is in character and what He has created us to share in as His image bearers.

The Example Of Jesus

In the gospel of Mark, we see two simple examples of Jesus Himself demonstrating the values of hospitality in life and mission. Matthew 8:1-4 tells the story of Jesus, on mission for God, giving specific focus to the needs of the crowd, namely that of food. He knew that sharing food with this crowd was a tremendous demonstration of family and care for them. It broke down their guards and welcomed them into a deeper engagement with what He would eventually tell them about the gospel. Later, in Mark 10:13-16, Jesus steps even more intimately into this hospitality lifestyle by making a point to welcome the little children to come close to Him. He wanted them to also know the familial open door of God to them, that they could approach closely to Him, as they would a family member, and just be with Him. These are simple, yet profound, examples of Jesus opening his “home” to them and welcoming people close to Him as He lived a purposeful, missional life.

The Example Of The Early Church

In the books of Acts, we see another simple example of this family-oriented, God-imagined life of hospitality in the life and mission of the first local church. Acts 2:42-47 gives a simple description of this church and how amazingly effective they were for God, largely due to the family posture they adopted. Here are those simple values that they “devoted themselves to:”

1. the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship
2. the breaking of bread and the prayers
3. togetherness
4. selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds
5. attending the temple together
6. breaking bread in their homes
7. receiving their food with glad and generous hearts
8. praising God and having favor with all the people.

The conclusion of this simple lifestyle? “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Evidence

Looking across the people groups and cultures of the world we find a common thread of hospitality. This human universal posture affirms the biblical conclusion that life in community is shared and expressed through hospitality, namely the sharing of food. Many of these cultures have scarred this “image-bearer” quality through their sin, yet the echos of God’s original design remain. This is illustrated in our own culture that still maintains a strong connection of community with food, yet the context for this sharing of life has moved almost exclusively from the personal home to the impersonal restaurant. Here are a few examples of this idea from other parts of the world and throughout human history.

National Geographic

“The sharing of food has always been part of the human story. From Qesem Cave near Tel Aviv comes evidence of ancient meals prepared at a 300,000-year-old hearth, the oldest ever found, where diners gathered to eat together. Retrieved from the ashes of Vesuvius: a circular loaf of bread with scoring marks, baked to be divided. To break bread together, a phrase as old as the Bible, captures the power of a meal to forge relationships, bury anger, provoke laughter. Children make mud pies, have tea parties, trade snacks to make friends, and mimic the rituals of adults. They celebrate with sweets from the time of their first birthday, and the association of food with love will continue throughout life—and in some belief systems, into the afterlife. Consider the cultures that leave delicacies graveside to let the departed know they are not forgotten.”

Josefina García Jiménez, Milpa Alta People Group - Mexico

“In my experience there is a glue, a bonding, that comes from the time together at the table...”

Siar People Group, Papua New Guinea

The Siar people mark nearly every significant engagement with people by sharing food. Marriage, legal resolutions, welcoming visitors, hosting of any visitor during meal time, and even deaths are all shared together with food.