

The Subversive Work of Hospitality 2021 – 1 Pet 4:8-9

Introduction – Even before COVID, our culture had become individuals more and more isolated from one another. Fears of all kinds moved Americans to value safety over freedoms. Trust that Big Government could do a better job of managing our welfare and growing suspicion towards one another (which grows as we know one another less and less) increases our isolation tendencies. Add to that the cancel culture mentality which is zeroing in more and more on evangelical, orthodox Christianity, her morals and values, and the church is finding itself shouted down, ignored, and under soft persecutions. Putting up a church building will give us a visible presence, but you have a ministry available to you to serve your brothers and sisters in Christ now, and to reach friends and neighbors with what they crave. Community. Fellowship. Friendship. Sympathy. Encouragement. Rest. The purpose of the text and message is to exhort us to a part of kingdom building that is right at our fingertips – actually right in our homes and around our dinner tables.

Fervent Love (1 Pet 4:8) – This Greek word, translated “*fervent*” is not emphasizing the emotions. It rather suggests the taut muscle of strenuous and sustained effort. It means earnest, zealous, continuous, and “with straining.” This is how our love for one another is to be described, and this is because it is hard work loving fellow sinners. Think of love not requiring a bunch of feelings, but rather a bunch of work. This is the kind of love that “covers a multitude of sins.”

Hypocrisy and Table Fellowship (Gal 2:11-13) – Peter had been guilty at another time of lacking such fervent love towards brothers who were different than him. Pressured by the Judaizers, Peter wanted to bar his fellowship from other brothers and sisters. Paul rebuked Peter particularly at this point of table fellowship, believing it threatened the very gospel.

The Hospitality of a Transformed Peter (1 Pet 4:7,9) – Peter was transformed through Paul’s rebuke and you see it here and elsewhere as he commands all Christians to be hospitable with one another. Peter is writing during a time of great distress for these churches as they suffer persecution and he both encourages and warns them that “the end of all things is at hand” (v7). They must be serious and watchful in their prayers, have fervent love for one another and be hospitable. This word, “*hospitable*” literally means “*lover of strangers*” and had the idea of providing shelter, food, and protection to a person traveling or in need. We get our word “*hospital*” from the same root, originally meaning “*shelter for the needy*,” and even “*a guest-house or inn*.” And so this command has the idea of providing a place “*for sick or wounded people*,” people who needed shelter, care, encouragement, and not only medical attention. However, it is not simply a command towards house travelers, for Peter commands us to be hospitable “*to one another*.” In other words, this is a reciprocal command. It is part of *fervently* loving one another.

Hospitality, Table Fellowship, and the Gospel – We must stop thinking of evangelism as solely the work of putting out information, facts, and proclamations. We must stop thinking of discipleship as only Bible study. That is modern Gnosticism. Community is not built primarily through programs. In the end, the body is knit together around a meal.

The Practice of the Early Church (Acts 2:46-47) – In corporate worship (at the Temple) and breaking bread house to house, the world began to be taken over as the Lord added daily to the church.

The Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-20) – The problem of hypocrisy at the Table was that they were eating the “one body” while living in divisions and factions. But this teaches us something about the nature of meals – it is something which draws us together, knits us together. Around the Eucharist, God is covenantally meeting with us at a meal. Gospel is spoken, given, received, and eaten.

The Teachings of Jesus – Throughout the NT, Jesus is portrayed as a gracious host, welcoming children, prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors, and sinners into His presence. He warned us to make sure we invite the downtrodden who cannot pay us back (Luke 14:13-14). He described the kingdom in terms of a wedding feast (Luke 14:15-24), and His ministry constantly centered around meals, culminating in the Last Supper. After His resurrection, He continued to disciple around a meal (John 21:9-13).

Subversive Hospitality: Bringing them into your Home – Hospitality is transforming because it is Christ-like. We are bringing people into our homes, our personal space, our personal time – we cannot help but give them some of us in the process. And we have Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Building Community – In a society in which family members eat alone and on the run, we need to recover the gift of sharing our lives around tables and in our homes. “...in most cultures, eating together expresses mutuality, recognition, acceptance, and equal regard.” – C. Pohl.

Expanding Community – Within that community, the church family invites others into their presence, the glory of Christ-in-community is the gospel incarnate, a place where forgiveness, reconciliation with God and man, the giving of thanks, the sharing of one’s life, makes sense to those outside the covenant – because they can see it.

Two Cautions – Much needs to be addressed regarding the pursuit of Christian hospitality, but lets end this morning with two caveats.

Seasons – There are seasons in life where it is good to offer lots of hospitality. There are other seasons in life where it is not good. You can only give what you have. There must be peace and blessing in the home, for instance, first.

Men – Hospitality is not a chick-thing. It is a qualification requirement for being an officer in the church (1 Tim 3:2). This sermon should challenge the men first, and then the women.

Hospitality is Dangerous. Hospitality is costly. Hospitality is interruptive. Hospitality is terribly vulnerable. Hospitality is a powerful Christ-imitating virtue. Hospitality is subversive against the hate-speech of this world against Christ and His followers. Hospitality is the gospel in action, my life for yours, my home for you. “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Heb 13:2). And if not angels, you will often be amazed at how much more you were blessed having those folks in your home than they were as they received your hospitality. And remember what C. S. Lewis said, “...You have never talked to a mere mortal.” Those are immortal souls around your table.