

Intro:

What is hospitality? Simply put it's the welcoming provision of food and shelter. Its care for the stranger, its putting someone else's needs first.

There are many barriers to hospitality – just the busyness of modern life makes us want to say “give me a break today, I just can't cope with one other thing”.

There's tiredness with work and family “I just need to sit at the back at church and recharge my own batteries”.

There's depression and self pity – “no-one will want to talk to me/ or visit my house anyway”.

Perhaps you are an introvert type “I'm just not a people person and I get a headache talking after church”.

Hospitality is hard. Our comfort may be disrupted, our schedules certainly are when we invite others to enter our home and we orientate our lives around someone else's routines and someone else's needs. Hospitality is hard. Our material possessions may be scratched, broken or smashed, our gardens may be trampled and our food is consumed sometimes at greater rates than we were expecting. Hospitality is hard.

It challenges our time management, our money management and sometimes disrupts our usual patterns of relationships. Hospitality is sometimes embarrassing – I once served up caterpillars in cauliflower cheese!!!

But the problems really boil down to our heart attitudes:

Pride, selfishness, greed.

Pride that says my stuff is too good to let the youth group come and wreck it. Pride that also says my stuff is not good enough to share, I'm too embarrassed about my cooking abilities, my flat is too small, or, I just don't want others to see how I live. Ultimately its pride that says, I want to live for me, in fact I want to worship me and keep my life to myself.

Selfishness that holds onto **my** timetable and controls **my** schedule and doesn't want to put itself out for anyone. Serving others? "Oh no, they should serve me" because ultimately selfishness is self worship and the desire that others should also worship and serve me.

Greed grasps onto all our stuff and says **mine**. I worked for it, I made it and I'm going to eat it or use it myself.

Can you see the pattern? Our refusal to be hospitable towards others stems from idolatry.

We want to worship ourselves rather than God.

Well...If this is a command from God (which it is) to every single Christian (which it is) how on earth are we to do it? Who can change our hearts?

What could possibly motivate us to do this?

The Bible gives us three things:

God's Character

God's love to us in Christ

Christ's example

1. God's Character

From the very opening pages of the Bible we see God's hospitality to those created in his image. Now I love gardens and it's a great pleasure to visit the Botanics and to see the careful design involved in creating beauty out of growing things and to see the vegetable plots abundantly producing food in the demonstration gardens. Gardens can stun us by their beauty – I read an article about the opening of the Eden project in Cornwall, some of the visitors were overcome and burst into tears! Gardens also provide food for us – there's a 7-year waiting list to get an allotment in Edinburgh.

In Genesis ch2 we see the provision of God for his people –“ **8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

How lush is this description: a garden, beauty, provision, life sustaining, watered.

I don't think this is your average back yard - its serious acreage, abounding in plenty.

After the fall God still sustains his people, he sends them out clothed.... to explore the rest of this green and blue planet that he had created for them, bird, plants, animals for food, ground to till for crops and astounding beauty.

I know many of you will have traveled this summer, think of the beauty and variety of the places that you visited. God's created world is a constant, daily miracle. Every breath we take God has delicately arranged the gases in the air so that it perfectly sustains us.

Think over the Sunday morning sermons on Exodus, God sustained his people with water, supernatural bread from heaven – manna, and quail, for 40 years while they were in a desert landscape!

He brought them into a land that is stickily described as flowing with milk and honey.

Lush, lavish provision.

Whizzing through to the book of Revelation, Christians today are heading not towards reincarnation into a better or worse repeat of this life, Neither are they heading to a life of endless floating around on a Hollywood designed cloud.

But we are invited to a feast – we are going to be made welcome at the wedding supper of the Lamb, to the new heavens and the new earth, to a mansion prepared for us with many rooms, to share God's dwelling place. God's hospitality to us in providing for us will last for eternity.

This is the God we serve, who is creative in hospitality, who is longsuffering in hospitality and is lavish in hospitality. Does this motivate you to copy God in giving loving provision to others?

2. God's love to us in Christ

[Put Rom 5:8 verse up on screen]

Alison read this verse as she was advertising our time together and after going from Genesis to Revelation so far, I want to try to stick to the book of Romans for our remaining time. Romans 5:8 **but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** God takes us...while we are shaking our fist at him in rebellion..... and shows his love for us. He shows his sacrificial, costly love to us by sending his own son to die for us. Remember too, this is a whole different league of separation. God is utterly Holy and we are radically corrupted by sin in every part of our lives. The verses around this one refer to the human race as weak, ungodly and enemies of God. God in His amazing grace in saving us, moves us from a position of total alienation from him to....

Not just to the status of an acquaintance that we have buried your differences with and with whom you can now shake hands,

not just to the status of a guest in the far off guest wing of a large mansion,

not even to the status of a privileged guest that is allowed to come and gather round the family table.....

no - we are moved to the status of family itself. **We are given permanent rights of belonging.** We have been adopted. Look at Ch 8. **“15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”** And in v 29, he refers to Jesus as the brother of Christians **“29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** This means that we are in a new relationship not only with God to

whom we have been given the privilege of calling “Abba, Father” and Jesus to whom we are now made brothers but as fellow children of the living God that gives us a new relationship with each other. The family of God, spread across the globe and this room are now brothers and sisters with each other. As with human family relationships, hospitality is expected, given and received on a more frequent basis because of those relationships, so the church family is to model the same expectation of brotherly hospitality to each other. So then hospitality is to be shown to our fellow church family members first and then also to non-Christians.

In fact welcoming the stranger is what the word hospitality means. Because God in Christ has reached down to pluck us strangers from a life without Him to make us His children then we are to extend our hospitality to those who are strange to us as well. This is the God we serve, one who takes strangers and makes them family. One who takes enemies and loves them as children. One who reaches into our degradation and lifts us out, clothing us in His white robes of righteousness.

Giving some students Sunday lunch doesn't sound too hard by comparison does it.

Are we motivated to follow God's example? Are we so amazed by God's grace that we are willing to reach out to enemies, strangers, neighbours, our brothers and sisters in Christ to show love, welcome, hospitality to them, to live sacrificially, aiming for God's glory to be seen?

3. Christ's example

We are going to focus on ch 15 in a minute so I'm going to remind you of the context. Paul has been explaining God's glorious gospel to the Christians who live in Rome. He states his purpose in writing the book back in Ch 1 - **16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

As we have seen he goes on to describe how Jesus' death and resurrection have won for us the position of being justified before a holy God and just as amazingly - adopted into His family.

The last 4 chapters show how the Christians in Rome were to live out the truth of the gospel. – What difference would being forgiven and made righteous through Christ and being a part of God's family actually make to their day to day lives? How actually were they going to live by faith? How are we, who are Christians here today, going to live by faith?

A pre- summary of these 4 chapters is again how Paul starts in ch12. –

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

'The righteous shall live by faith' by sacrifice, by saying no to the values of this world and being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

How does this then translate to hospitality, later on in ch 12 Paul gives a list of marks of a true Christian and included here is hospitality. V13 says “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”

The Christian is to seek - to look out for opportunities - to show hospitality both to the saints ie other Christians, who are in need, and as a means of blessing those who are actually persecuting us. The Christian is called to lay aside worldly ‘normal’ behaviour and bless those who persecute us. The Christian is called to make sacrificial contributions to fellow Christians in need.

Finally lets move on to Christ’s example, if you have a bible with you turn with me to Romans 15:1-7.

“1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you *to live in such harmony* with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

The word used in our passage today in v7 is welcome. This means to accept or to receive and I think you see the link to hospitality. I like thinking about welcoming as well as

hospitality because they ring different bells in our minds. Hospitality - we think of food, shelter and our homes. Welcoming - we think of those who serve on the welcome team at church and we think more about our attitude in showing hospitality. Both of these overlap and both are commanded by Jesus.

So lets look at the example of Christ's attitude.

First of all v1 talks about those who are strong bearing with the failings of the weak and here that means other Christians who have weaker consciences. Paul has spent the last whole chapter on this subject and here is summing up his argument in these verses. People who have weaker consciences then meant those who were keeping the Jewish Sabbath despite being now Christians or those who felt guilty about eating food that were prohibited under Jewish law. Today its perhaps people who we don't see eye to eye with on all matters of faith and doctrine! Perhaps younger Christians who are taking baby steps in their Christian life and don't know or understand the Bible very well. Or those who have grown up in a different denomination or culture and interpret parts of the Bible differently to how we would. In short it is those not like us. And again that notion of hospitality meaning welcoming the stranger comes to mind.

What then is to be our attitude?

- We are not to please ourselves because Christ did not please himself.

This cuts at the root of our selfishness doesn't it. We are to follow our Lord in saying 'not my will but your will be done'.

- We are to please our neighbour for his good and to build him or her up. The reason here is because Christ bore the reproach that we deserved. How can we please our fellow Christian for their good and how can we build them up with hospitality?

Hospitality is a great gateway for fellowship. It's the arena in which doing good and particularly building each other up can take place. Think of hospitality as a door to deeper fellowship. Looking back to our womens brunch in May, we considered reading the Bible one – 2-one or in trios. Well hospitality is the context in which this happens - you have to meet somewhere. Why not use this day to plan to meet with a younger or an older woman to read the Bible together. We are to do good to others because Christ did good for us in taking the punishment for sin that we deserved.

- We are to welcome one another because Christ has welcomed us.

Looking on to v7 he summarises this short passage and the previous chapter with these words, “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

We are to welcome each other because Christ has welcomed us. There perhaps isn't a clearer reason given for hospitality than that. As we have received, we are to give. There is no one on this planet further away from us than we were from God. He has welcomed us, even us, and we are to welcome each other. A further reason is given here – this will bring glory to God himself. What a privilege we have as Christians. Something so easy as being welcoming to those around you in church or inviting someone into your home, will bring glory to God. How does that happen? – Well in 2 ways at least. When we put others first, serve others and accept each other we are showing that God has transformed our hearts. Only God can do this and it shows his power at work in us. He is in the business of changing us from selfish to selfless.

The other way is the promise in John 13 that Christians are to love one another (and hospitality is one good way of doing that) and by doing this the world will look on and say – they must be Jesus’ disciples to do that. God’s power at work in His people will be recognizable even by non-Christians. Witness to Christ in this way brings God glory. Meal ministry example...

Now I know that I started this talk with doom and gloom. I said that hospitality is hard (and it is hard to say no to ourselves and yes to God’s will). But there are blessings with hospitality. There are always blessings in obedience. In fact one of the main blessings of obedience is the marvel at God’s grace in changing our hearts to desire to say no to ourselves and yes to His will. There is no human being who will know us as we know ourselves. We are the ones who understand our own hearts the most and when we look back and see how God has changed us – it is so encouraging to see what God can do with truly dreadful raw material – I’m speaking for myself here. But all of us as we mature in Christian faith will be able to wonder at God’s willingness and power to change us.

As well as the blessings of obedience, there are the real blessings of actually giving hospitality. We have had the most amazing people to stay with us – those who have challenged us with their lives and godly example, those who are godly even when round the breakfast table suffering from jetlag. One of the hospitality commands in Hebrew tells us that we may entertain angels when giving hospitality and I think God in His mercy has sent us guests who have been God’s messengers to us – encouraging us and exhorting us by word or by the life lived in front of us. Hospitality widens your horizons as you get to know other cultures whether local or global. Giving hospitality lifts your eyes from your

own small world and lets you see what God is doing in someone else's life. Hospitality teaches your children many different things that are a blessing for them to learn, for instance that though people are different, different accents, colours, languages, backgrounds, there is one God who has saved us all. Hospitality teaches your children and yourself to care for others and to share everything. Giving hospitality shows your children God's love in action reaching out to non-Christian neighbours or to those in need. And hospitality expands our friendships. There are many, many blessings of hospitality.

After reminding us of our obligation to bear with the weak and to please our neighbour, following Christ's example of not pleasing ourselves, Paul goes on in v4 "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

He has given all this [hold up Bible] encouragement for us. In order that we might have hope. We are to be encouraged by the scriptures to press on in hope. And we know that hope is not seen, indeed we are waiting as ch 8 tells us for our adoption as sons on that final day when our bodies are redeemed, we are to wait patiently in obedience for that hope.

Our God is the God of endurance, he will help us when its hard. Our God is the God of encouragement, he will encourage us to keep going. In v 5 he prays that this same God of encouragement and endurance would enable these Christians to live in harmony with each other as they are in Christ and that by doing so they might glorify God together with one voice. How we treat each other has the potential to sound out a great symphony in glory to God. Unbelievers will hear this music of love, care and hospitality and the harmony will glorify God. Its only when the whole choir sings together, in one harmonious

voice that the music is worth listening too. We are all called to this - in these 7 verses, there are many references to the whole church - 'each of us', 'one another', 'one voice', 'together'. Just as we became Christians – so that's all of us - in the same way that Christ has welcomed us, we are to love one another.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant us *to live in such harmony* with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and grow in welcoming one another just as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God.” Amen