



Communal Culture: Table Fellowship

Notes

In-groups

- Share something in common
- People or group you support, respect, honor, give loyalty to
- Stronger in the Ancient Near East, due to communal culture -- care for and redeem as needed
- Your Bet Av, clan, neighbors, friends, village, tribe
- Flexible depending on context but your core family is always in

Out-groups

- All others
- You are indifferent to or disdain
- Us vs them, human vs doubtfully human

Table Fellowship

- Only eat with others in your in-group
- Sharing a meal = sharing a life
- Public -- all see who eats together

Jesus Interacts with Other Groups and Invites them to his In-group

Righteous

- Disciples called, e.g. fishermen -- not perfect, but want to obey God
- Pharisees -- goal to strictly obey God
 - Only eat with others who are like-minded
 - Jesus ate with them (e.g. Luke 7) = saw Jesus in their in-group, much-shared theology
 - Debate was common within Pharisees, does not equal being against
 - Some accepted Jesus, defended him and the apostles; others rejected him

Tax Collectors and Sinners

- Matthew 9:10-13 -- Matthew the tax collector has banquet with other tax collectors and Jesus
- The Pharisees are upset as they see Jesus in their in-group; tax collectors are traitors; need to avoid sinners
- Jesus explains he has come for sinners

Judeans

- Judeans in separate in-group from Galileans, viewed themselves as better educated and elite
- Most of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, most conflicts in Judea (John 7:1)
- John calls Judeans "Jews," usually referring to the religious leaders that are against Jesus
- Sadducees ran the temple; out-group to Jesus. They reject him.
- Some Judeans believe in Jesus, especially after he raises Lazarus from the dead (John 12:11).

Samaritans

- Disdained by Jews, they are "half-breeds," half-Jewish
- Jesus interacts with them. Example: John 4 woman at the well
- Jesus included them in the definition of "neighbor" (Luke 10:25-37)
 - Leviticus 19:18 - love your neighbor "like you"
 - The traditional definition was to love *if* your neighbor is like you (fellow Jews only); Jesus interprets it as love *because* your neighbor is like you (everyone made in God's image).

Gentiles

- Acts 10 Peter's vision = do not call any person unclean
- Love feasts in the early church: people from separate in-groups eating and worshipping together.
- Despite differences, unified in Christ with one Spirit: no Jew/Gentile, male/female, slave/free
- Communion/Eucharist is in this setting, communing together at the table

The Bible ends with the wedding supper of the lamb (Revelation 19).

Discussion Questions

Read these texts in light of in-group/out-group interactions.

1. Luke 11:5-8
2. Luke 15:1-2
3. Galatians 3:28-29
4. 1 Corinthians 11:17-29 -- think about "discerning the body" with the church as an in-group
5. Revelation 3:19-20 (Jesus speaking to believers who have gone astray)

Read Luke 14:1-24. What is the setting? Who is there?

1. Verses 1-11: With a table in public view, discuss the impact of seats having levels of honor.
2. Verses 12-14: Why is this counter-cultural?
3. Verses 15-24: Discuss the banquet imagery of the Kingdom of God. Who is in and who is out?

Recommended Resources

[Windows on the World of Jesus](#) by Bruce Malina

Learn more about in-groups, out-groups, and other relationships in first-century Judea.



[Robber's Cave experiment](#) (The Guardian)

About the opening story

