WE ARE NOT INVITED

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You see, the problem with an invitation is that you can politely decline it. You may be being ungracious or impolite, but you can always refuse an invitation. If you decline a command, you are being disobedient, no ifs, no buts.
Category: Mission

Missionaries and theologians are as fashion conscious as anyone else. That doesn't mean they wear the latest style of clothes (have you ever seen a missionary?) but they way we talk about mission and theology has trends and fashions just as much as music, clothes or cinema.

One area of mission studies which is very fashionable in some circles at the moment is "The Mission of God" (or *"missio Dei"Â* if you want to sound really cool and speak in Latin). The problem is, as I have mentioned more than once before, the term "Mission of God" is understood and interpreted in a number of fashions.

However, I think there are some other problems with the way in which people talk about the "Mission of God" which I've not previously highlighted and in a short series (two or three) of blog posts, I'd like to illustrate some of these issues.

Firstly, let's put down some basics.

I fully believe that mission is first and foremost God's activity. He is in the process of reconciling all things in heaven and earth to himself, through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. His mission has worked through the history of Israel, to the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the coming of the Spirit and through two thousand years of the life of the church. It is God who is building his church. The amazing thing is that he does so much of this through human agency. God has his mission, but he accomplishes it through his people. He doesn't need us, but he chooses to use us.

I believe this, I've written it, I've preached it and I'll continue to do so. If this is what people mean by the "Mission of God", then I'm on the side of the angels.

The problem Id like to highlight today, comes when people expand from this basis to say that "God invites us to participate in his mission". My precise problem is with the word "invite".

I get where people are coming from. Mission is God's activity, he can accomplish it without us, but he chooses to involve us, so people say that he "invites" us.

The problem is that Scripture doesn't contain a lot of language about "invitation". Let's look at what many take to be the key mission passages in Scripture.

> *"...Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.â€ (Matthew 28:19-20)*

The key to this verse, is theÂ *command* to "make disciples". It isn't an invitation, a suggestion or a hint, it's a command.

> *He said to them, â€œGo into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation..." (Mark 16:15)*

OK. this one is of dubious textual authority, but if you believe that the end of Mark 16 is authentic, you have to acknowledge that it contains a command - not an invitation.

> *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.â€ (Acts 1:8)*

Luke does not record Jesus commanding his disciples to go into all the world, he simply assumes that they will and makes the statement that they will be his witnesses (see also Luke 24:48).

> *Again Jesus said, â€œPeace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.â€ (John 20:21)*

John doesn't actually frame Jesus' words as a command, but there is definitely an implied command (sending the church into the world) in here.

For key passages from Scripture, three with commands sending the Church on mission and one with a description and not a hint of an invitation in sight.

Now, I realise that part of the rationale for "Mission of God" thinking is to move us from concentrating on key mission passages in Scripture such as the ones I've just cited, to seeing mission as running through the whole of the Bible. This is something that I've argued for in these virtual pages. However, we can't nullify the plain commands of Jesus by appealing to a fuller reading of Scripture. The "great commission" is not the only Bible passage on mission - far from it - but it is there and we can't ignore it.

You see, the problem with an invitation is that you can politely decline it. You may be being ungracious or impolite, but you can always refuse an invitation. If you decline a command, you are being disobedient, no ifs, no buts.

Our generation is more comfortable with a God who invites us to participate in mission than a God who commands us to make disciples across the world.