

DOCTRINE OF HOSPITALITY

- I. Definition and preliminary considerations.
 - A. Hospitality deals with the interpersonal relationship between a host and a guest; it specifically includes the reception and entertainment of friends, guests, visitors, and strangers.
 - B. One component of true hospitality is that it is to be provided freely, without coercion, and with no expectation of temporal recompense.
 - C. The English term **hospitality** is derived from the Latin root *hospitem*, which is a compound that literally means to have power over strangers.
 - D. Webster defines hospitality as the art or practice of being hospitable; the hospitable person is one that welcomes guests in a generous and cordial fashion.
 - E. The guest may be anyone from a close personal friend to a relative, an acquaintance or a complete stranger; however, it should be noted that the emphasis in the Bible is on showing hospitality to strangers.
 - F. Since it is evident that the practice of hospitality is one of the Royal Imperatives in the New Testament, the practice of hospitality qualifies as a potential area of Divine Good Production. Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; IPet. 4:9
 - G. Since hospitality is one aspect of Divine Good production, God has obligated Himself to reward those that engage in it properly.
 - H. As with any area of Divine Good production, hospitality must be offered in accordance with the biblical guidelines, with the proper mental attitude motives, and executed in fellowship in order to qualify for reward.
 - I. As will become evident, there are biblical guidelines for the proper practice of hospitality; further, there are times when hospitality is not appropriate, and individuals to whom one is not to offer hospitality.

- II. Vocabulary.
 - A. Hebrew vocabulary.
 1. In spite of the fact that there is no specific Hebrew term that deals with the issue of hospitality, there are a number of passages that demonstrate that this concept was not only commanded, it was regularly practiced. Deut. 24:19-22; Gen. 18:1-8, 19:1-3
 2. Greek vocabulary.
 - a. δέχομαι (dechomai), verb, 56X; to receive something offered or transmitted by someone else, to be receptive of someone, to welcome, or receive. When used of welcoming someone into one's house it has the nuance of showing hospitality.
 - 1.) ἀναδέχομαι (anadechomai), verb, 2X; lit. to receive or welcome up or again.
 - 2.) προσδέχομαι (prosdechomai), verb, 14X; to receive favorably, to show welcome hospitality.
 - 3.) ὑποδέχομαι (hupodechomai), verb, 4X; to welcome or receive one as a guest, to receive hospitably.

- b. ξένος (xenos), adj. 14X; pertaining to being unfamiliar with someone or something. It is used to denote that which is foreign or strange. In some contexts, it refers to the host, who extends hospitality and treats the stranger as a guest. Rom. 16:23
 - 1.) ξενίζω (xenizo), verb, 10X; to show hospitality, to receive as a guest, to provide lodging for someone.
 - 2.) ξενία (xenia), noun, 2X; hospitality or entertainment shown to a guest. It is also used of the room where the guest lodged. Philemon 1:22
 - 3.) ξενοδοχέω (xenodocheo), verb, 1X; to show hospitality to strangers.
 - 4.) φιλοξενία (philoxenia), noun, 2X; lit. a fondness or love for strangers, kindness to strangers, hospitality.
 - 5.) φιλόξενος (philoxenos), adj. 3X; lit. stranger loving, kind to strangers, hospitable.

- III. The historical basis for the practice of Old Testament hospitality.
 - A. One important factor that is observed in the Old Testament with respect to hospitality is the alien/stranger motif.
 - B. Hospitality customs in the ancient world dealt with two distinct classes of people: the traveler and the resident alien, which are pretty clearly distinguished in the Old Testament.
 - C. Both groups are referred to as strangers, since they did not belong to a particular community or group; however, one would travel on and remain a stranger, while another might settle permanently among the Jews.
 - D. Under the Mosaic Law, the resident alien, who was a foreigner that had settled permanently among the people, was provided protection, and allowed to participate in communal activities. Lev. 19:33-34, 24:22; Num. 9:14, 15:15-16; Deut. 10:18
 - E. The traveler, on the other hand, had few legal or political rights in the ancient world; he was largely at the mercy of the residents in the place to which he traveled.
 - F. The traveler, therefore, was extremely vulnerable; very often, the custom of hospitality provided protection for him, since it was recognized that the host was responsible for the safety of his guests. Gen. 19: 8
 - G. The second critical factor in the ancient world was the harsh environment of the arid, desert lands that many of these residents and nomads occupied.
 - H. Since food and water were of paramount concern, most communities were situated near water sources, which they protected diligently.
 - I. Although the traveler needed access to food and water, those that were settled had the reasonable expectation of protection from outside aggressors.
 - J. As a result of these realities, strict codes of conduct were developed; these provided an obligation for the residents to provide for travelers (Deut. 23:4), and for the travelers not to engage in any hostile actions toward their host.
 - K. One important aspect of the hospitality code was that the traveler was expected to accept what the host offered to him; refusing such hospitality was viewed as an insult that suggested that one was an enemy.
 - L. On the other hand, a traveler would interpret a resident's failure to provide food and supplies as a hostile act. Judges 8:4-9; ISam. 25:2-17
 - M. For one to accept the hospitality of another, which was viewed as an act of friendship, and then to betray the host, was viewed as a contemptible act. Ps. 41:9; Obad. 7

- IV. The first evidence we find in the Old Testament for the practice of hospitality is observed in the life of Abraham, who became a model for Jewish hospitality. Gen. 18:1-8
- A. Abraham demonstrated that he understood the principle of hospitality as he observed three men coming toward his camp. Gen. 18:2
 - B. He clearly manifests a willingness and a desire to show the appropriate hospitality as seen in his haste to approach the men. Gen. 18:2
 - C. He demonstrates his humility and willingness to serve by overtly bowing at the feet of the three visitors; this indicates that he viewed it as a privilege to show hospitality to these men. Gen. 18:2
 - D. As was customary, Abraham offered the travelers all that was needed for them to cleanse themselves from the dust and dirt that clung to them; the feet were definitely in need of cleansing, since most people generally wore sandals. Gen. 18:4, 24:32
 - E. Further, he offered them the time and a place in his camp to refresh themselves from the desert heat before they continued their journey. Gen. 18:4
 - F. As we observe, Abraham downplayed the effort and expense to show what he deemed to be appropriate hospitality, offering his guests **a little water, and a piece of bread.** Gen. 18:4-5
 - G. As the guest should do, the Lord accepted what was presented in the generous spirit in which it was offered. Gen. 18:5
 - H. Abraham demonstrated his wisdom by delegating certain aspects of his plan to show hospitality to Sarah and his servants; however, it is clear that he oversaw every aspect of this encounter. 18:6-7
 - I. He recognized the need for haste, and made his preparations very quickly, so that his guests were not kept waiting. Gen. 18:6
 - J. What was described as bread and water (typical of oriental deprecation) is now presented to his guests in the form of perfectly roasted meat, and butter/curds/cheese/cream, to go with Sarah's bread. Gen. 18:8
 - K. Abraham presents this bountiful meal to his guests and, as an attentive host, he stands at the ready so he could provide anything else that his guests might require. Gen. 18:8
 - L. It is evident in this account that Abraham forms a pattern that is to be emulated when one is called upon to demonstrate hospitality.
 - M. Laban welcomed the servant of Abraham by extending similar hospitality, which reflected the custom; however, one should recognize that Laban's actions and motives were suspect, whereas Abraham's were not. Gen. 24:28-33
- V. Hospitality in the New Testament.
- A. During the life of Christ, an incident occurred at the home of Simon the Pharisee, which demonstrated that hospitality was still an expected part of Jewish culture. Lk. 7:36-47
 - B. Simon failed to provide the most basic elements of hospitality, which was viewed by Jesus Christ as a profound insult. Lk. 7:44-46
 - C. Additionally, as a guest that had been invited specifically, failure to show common courtesy also hinted at an element of hostility toward Jesus. Lk. 7:39
 - D. Jesus clearly understood the basis for hospitality, and He was the recipient of it on a number of occasions. Lk. 5:29, 7:36ff, 11:37, 14:7ff, Mk. 14:3ff
 - E. When Jesus Christ sent the apostles out on their first tour of duty, He instructed them to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they were sent; similar commands were given to the 70 on the second tour. Matt. 10:9-11

- F. In this case, it is evident that the right to expect hospitality was accentuated by the fact that these men were bearers of the good news of salvation, sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God.
- G. Even the most insignificant demonstration of hospitality toward a representative of Jesus Christ is viewed as a virtue that is to be rewarded with the greatest of blessings. Matt. 10:40-42
- H. Additionally, the rejection of the messenger of God, as evidenced by the refusal to show the appropriate hospitality, was to be rewarded with an overt witness of disgust that signified the innocence of the messenger, and the guilt of the offenders. Matt. 10:14-15
- I. In the early stages of the Church Age, the primary ministries in the Church were itinerant in nature; this included the offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelist. Eph. 4:11
- J. Add to this the reality the fact that the apostles (itinerant as they were) could not be in every place at once; therefore, apostolic troubleshooters, such as Timothy, Titus, and Mark, were also dependent upon the hospitality of others. Phil. 2:29
- K. At the outset, these were all Jews, who were often offered hospitality during their travels by other Jews, who were knowledgeable about the expectation and practice of this virtue.
- L. In that regard, this custom was invaluable in the early success and spreading of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.
- M. As the rift between Jewish Christianity and Judaism became more pronounced, and as the first Christian churches were founded, the exercise of hospitality took on a new aspect.
- N. Not only did the traveling Christian look to other believers for hospitality, but the individual churches often looked to the traveler for further revelation of God's plan. Acts 16:17
- O. Therefore, hospitality became an indispensable virtue, which was a very important factor in the advance and success of the early Church.
- P. This is certainly one major reason for the emphasis that we find on the practice of hospitality in the New Testament. Rom. 12:13, 16:1-2,23
- Q. As the itinerant aspect of the apostolic age grew to a close, and the churches became more organized, having a single pastor-teacher, and a plurality of deacons (ITim. 3:1,8), practice of hospitality was not eliminated, but became a requirement of the ministry. ITim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8
 - 1. As with other duties in the ministry, the pastor-teacher cannot allow any application to interfere with the study-teach routine. ITim. 4:13-16; IITim. 4:1-5
 - 2. Nevertheless, it is evident that a pastor-teacher is not to become a recluse, who does not engage in any interaction between himself, the congregation, or others.
 - 3. He is to model the doctrine he teaches, and must not fall into the ivory tower syndrome. IPet. 5:1ff
- R. As with the application of many doctrines, the exercise of such hospitality could become burdensome at times (Lk. 11:5-6); nevertheless, believers are exhorted to continue to make the appropriate applications, in spite of the difficulties involved. Gal. 6:9-10
- S. Additionally, the appearance of false teachers in the local churches created a new set of problems when it came to extending hospitality; this is certainly reflected in the second epistle of John. IIJn. 1:10-11
- T. In spite of the difficulties involved in application, or dealing with those people that abuse grace, one of the last epistles written in the New Testament stresses the importance of continuing to show hospitality. Heb. 13:2

- VI. Hospitality is a Royal Imperative for all Church Age believers, and should be practiced as opportunities present themselves, and as is appropriate.
- A. There can be no question that hospitality is incumbent upon believers in this dispensation, since it is commanded in the New Testament. Heb. 13:2
 - B. Although the imperative is not used, there are a couple of verses dealing with the subject of hospitality that clearly have imperatival force. Rom. 12:13 (imperatival participle); IPet. 4:9 (continues the imperatival force of the previous two verses)
 - C. As noted previously, the practice of hospitality was considered so important that it was made part of the qualifications for those that aspired to the office of pastor-teacher (ITim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8); by extension, this same quality was expected in the deacons. ITim. 3:8 **“likewise”**
 - D. It was so important that any true widow that applied for Church support must have had a reputation for demonstrating hospitality. ITim. 5:10
 - E. As with any application of doctrine, the believer should walk in fellowship, and be sensitive to the opportunities that the Lord provides, rather than attempting to instigate or advance his own agenda.
 - F. Since this is a Royal Imperative, it is primarily to be applied to the Royal Family, which begins with the local ministry and expands outward.
 1. Other positive believers in the local church are to be the main priority. IPet. 4:9
 2. There is a place for sharing God’s blessings with the communicator that He has provided. Gal. 6:6; IThess. 5:12
 3. The passage in Thessalonians may well be expanded to include the deacons, since they labor with the pastor-teacher in the physical aspects of the local church.
 4. Other positive believers that come to this area are to be extended the blessing of hospitality, as is appropriate. Acts 16:33,34; 18:27; Col. 4:10
 - G. Although it is a Royal Imperative, there may be times when it **may** be appropriate to show hospitality to those that are not believers, or who are negative to doctrine. Lk. 10:33-35; ICor. 10:27
- VII. Hospitality in the modern age.
- A. It is evident that many things have changed since the time of Abraham; further, conditions that existed in the early New Testament churches have changed as well.
 - B. The spiritual environment is quite different, since the ministry is no longer itinerant, as it was under the apostles, prophets, and evangelists.
 - C. The church is no longer in the planting stage, with various spiritual authorities moving into new and uncharted areas, establishing churches as they travel.
 - D. Rather, the itinerant ministry has been replaced by the fixed ministry of a single pastor-teacher in a single local church, in a single geographic region.
 - E. Additionally, there is no sound biblical basis for believers practicing a nomadic lifestyle, roaming around at will, and attending whatever church they find to their liking.
 - F. Therefore, the practice of hospitality has lost some measure of the spiritual importance that it had in ancient times.
 - G. Nevertheless, given the fact that there are Royal Imperatives regarding this matter, it is evident that believers can and should continue to practice this virtue, even if in a more limited way.
 - H. Believers, pastor-teachers and deacons still do travel from time to time, and should certainly be treated in a manner that is appropriate for the saints.

- I. In every situation of hospitality there is the one demonstrating the hospitality (the host) and one receiving it (the guest).
- J. The responsibilities of the host.
 1. First, the host must recognize that the opportunity to show hospitality is a blessing; therefore, he should avoid any mental attitude or verbal sins. IPet. 4:9
 2. The guest must never be made to feel that he is an imposition (even if he is at times), and the host should communicate the sense that it is his privilege to serve and provide what the guest needs.
 3. Since a believer should be eager to show hospitality, he should provide a heartfelt and cordial welcome to the guest, taking responsibility for every aspect of the guest's stay with him.
 4. The host must recognize that the opportunity to show hospitality may come at an inconvenient time, which may test his grace orientation.
 5. Nevertheless, the guest should not be allowed to sense any of the difficulties that the host may face, since some momentary inconvenience may result in great eternal reward. Lk. 19:5-9
 6. The host should be sensitive to any itinerary that the guest may have, and avoid imposing his will or itinerary on the guest. Gen. 18:5
 7. The host is responsible for the safety, comfort, nourishment, rest, and entertainment of his guest; he should seek to provide these things in a poised, polite, and decorous fashion.
 8. As witnessed in Abraham, one person should have a master plan for showing hospitality, overseeing the various details of the entire process.
 9. When a couple is providing hospitality, it is not a signal for the husband to indulge in laziness while his wife does all the necessary work.
 10. While a good host seeks to keep his guests comfortable and entertained, there may come times when it is appropriate to leave the guests and attend to some necessary aspect of preparation. Gen. 18:6-7
 11. If the host has indicated that meals are to be served at a particular time, he is to be certain that they are served at that time, and not force his guest to wait.
 12. There are occasions in which basic hospitality is not enough; extravagance is not only appropriate on some occasions, it may be called for by virtue of the person or occasion. Jn. 2:6-10, 12:3
- K. The responsibilities of the guest.
 1. While believers should understand the role of the host in showing hospitality, they should understand what should be expected of the guest.
 2. Since it should not be the place of the host to tell a guest how to behave, believers should be knowledgeable as to those things that make one a good guest.
 3. The first thing that any good guest should know is that the host is under a certain amount of pressure as he seeks to provide for his guest.
 4. Therefore, the guest should seek to be as unobtrusive as possible, cooperating with the host as hospitality is shown.
 5. When a believer is invited for hospitality, he should be punctual.
 6. The guest should not be demanding, but seek to be of service, if needed; he should also be aware that the host may not want his assistance on certain occasions.

7. The guest should not seek to advance or honor himself in the home of his host; he should manifest humility, and the willingness to take a lower position. Lk. 14:7-11
 8. The guest should be sensitive to the schedule (presuming one is provided), and not overstay his appointed welcome.
 9. The guest should recognize that the host may have other guests or duties to attend to, and should not dominate the time of his host.
 10. If a guest is receiving hospitality while he is on vacation, he should recognize that his host is not on holiday with him.
 11. The guest should be careful to express the appropriate gratitude to his host, without being excessively effusive, since this may come across as unnatural.
- L. If believers simply apply the Golden Rule (either as host or guest), both will likely have a wonderful experience, which they would not mind repeating.

VIII. Although hospitality is a Royal Imperative, there are times when it is not appropriate to extend hospitality or to accept it.

- A. As with all the Royal Imperatives, hospitality must be kept in its proper place in terms of the priorities of the adjusted believer.
- B. Since the first priority of the believer is obedience to God, he must keep the main priority of spiritual growth in its proper place. IIPet. 3:18
- C. Therefore, when the exercise of hospitality interferes with the first priority of Bible class, Bible class is to generally retain precedence. Heb. 10:25
- D. A perfect example of a believer losing track of spiritual priorities is Martha, who was attempting to show hospitality to the Lord. Lk. 10:38-42
 - a. Martha seems to have been in charge (it is referred to as her home), and was engaged in a number of preparations for a large meal.
 - b. Mary, her sister, was sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ, and was engrossed in His teaching; therefore, she did nothing to help her sister.
 - c. Martha allowed this lack of support, coupled with the responsibilities that she had taken upon herself, to overwhelm her to the point that she lost some objectivity.
 - d. The Greek verb περισπάω (perispao) is used only here, and it has the literal sense of being dragged away; figuratively, it means to be distracted, worried, or anxious.
 - e. Luke's narrative comment on this event makes it quite clear that on this occasion, Martha was in the wrong and Mary was in the right.
 - f. Martha phrases her question to Jesus Christ (which is really an accusation) in such a way as to make it clear that she anticipated an affirmative answer.
 - g. In doing so, she makes it clear that she believed that showing hospitality to the Lord was more important than receiving His Word.
 - h. She goes so far as to issue a command to the Lord, with which she fully expected Him to comply.
 - i. He responds by using her name twice, which is designed to communicate the fact that He feels some kindly emotion toward Martha; in spite of her actions, the Lord was concerned about her worries.
 - j. Jesus responds with a gentle rebuke that lets Martha know that her priorities have become skewed, since she has lost sight of the first priority of feeding her soul.

- E. It is not appropriate to extend hospitality to those that do not adhere to sound doctrine, particularly to those that openly espouse disagreement with the good deposit. IIJohn. 7-11
1. It is evident that false teachers abounded in John's day; the prophetic word makes it explicit that there will likewise be a proliferation of false teachers in the last days. IITim. 3:5-9; IIPet. 2:1-3; Jude 3-4
 2. This short letter from John presupposes the fact that the positive believer(s) have a desire to advance the plan of God by showing the appropriate hospitality.
 3. In spite of that appropriate motivation, positive believers are to be very discriminating and discerning when dealing with those that are unknown spiritual quantities.
 4. Consequently, all believers have the right and obligation to carefully examine the doctrine of anyone that comes to them and claims positive volition.
 5. If the believer is not satisfied with respect to the doctrinal position of anyone that comes to him, he is not obligated to demonstrate hospitality.
 6. John's concern, and every other adjusted communicator's as well, is that those for whom he is responsible spiritually will be exposed to these destructive spiritual influences.
 7. There exists the very real possibility that those that bring false doctrine may undermine all the doctrinal work that John had already accomplished.
 8. Furthermore, when the sound doctrine is undermined, the potential for loss at the Bema Seat becomes a very real probability.
 9. In the end, John is quite explicit about the proper application, which is to refuse this type of person entrance into one's house.
 10. Additionally, the believer is not even to offer this person a greeting, which means that believer is to refuse even ordinary social customs, as he expresses his rejection of this person.
 11. Failure to dogmatically apply the doctrine of separation under these circumstances, makes the believer as guilty as the maladjusted person that comes to him.
 12. As John makes plain, the principle of cursing by association means that believer that even shakes the hand of this type of person will come under the same discipline.
- F. While John is primarily directing his comments toward false teachers that seek to proselytize, the same principles are to be applied toward the negative believer that has departed from the straight and narrow.
1. Certainly, the positive believer should not seek or desire fellowship with those that have walked away from the faith by virtue of demonic influence or human viewpoint. ITim. 4:1-3
 2. Paul makes it explicit that those that will not work to support themselves are not to be given an audience by adjusted believers. IIThess. 3:6,14
 3. He also makes it clear that those that are engaged in flagrant areas of sinning, who rationalize their behavior and do not deal with it under rebound and doctrine, are not candidates for social life with the positive believer. ICor. 5:9-11
 4. Believers are also to be alert to, and wary of, those that contradict the sound teaching that comes from the pulpit; social life with this type of believer exposes one to considerable spiritual danger. Rom. 16:17-18
 5. Any believer that has rejected the command to regularly assemble together is not a candidate for encouragement or hospitality. Heb. 10:25

- G. Therefore, it is evident that it is not appropriate for the positive believer to extend hospitality under certain circumstances.
- H. Likewise, there are circumstances that preclude the positive believer from accepting offers of hospitality from certain people.
 1. In general, any offer that would cause the believer to violate the doctrine of separation should be refused; this indicates that separation has a higher spiritual priority than hospitality does.
 2. Offers of hospitality that come at times when the believer is expected to assemble in Bible class are generally to be refused.
 3. The believer must recognize that there are certain types of people that are selfish and self-centered; one should refuse any hospitality they might offer. Prov. 23:6-8
 - a. This type of person has learned how to exhibit the façade of being a good host, one who feigns interest in the comfort and well-being of others.
 - b. In spite of that, he is actually motivated by money (Prov. 28:22), is truly inhospitable, and has a hidden agenda that does not have the good of others at heart.
 - c. This type of person is always concerned about the cost, his heart is not in whatever he offers, and any attempt at fellowship with him is not going to be fruitful.
 - d. In the end, Solomon teaches his son that eating and drinking with this type of person is not satisfying; on the contrary, rather than be a blessing, it will simply turn the stomach.
 4. Although not technically related to hospitality, a similar refusal to accept prosperity from those that are negative is observed in the life of Abraham. Gen. 14:13-23

IX. Concluding observations.

- A. Like any aspect of doctrine, the practice of hospitality should flow from the inner life of the adjusted believer.
- B. Believers have a multitude of imperatives that command them to be kind, generous, ready to share, to meet needs, and engage in good works.
- C. Although the believer may not have to apply this doctrine frequently (based on his niche, opportunities, geography, and other factors), when he does have to do so, he should seek to apply it well.
- D. Every believer should keep the Golden Rule before him, which should cause him to seek to be the kind of host or guest that he would want if the situation was reversed.
- E. All believers should recognize that every believer fails; therefore, you will not find either perfect hosts or perfect guests.
- F. Since no one can anticipate every possible exigency (what is required in a given situation), be gracious toward those that seek to apply, however imperfect the execution may be. Lk. 11:5-8