

## Hospitality: The Lost Art of Christian Service

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### Introduction:

I want to start with a quiz. Put your thinking caps on and determine which of the following are examples of the terms translated hospitality in the Bible? Circle as many as you think fit.

- ?? Donating food to a homeless shelter
- ?? Going out to eat with someone
- ?? Taking someone to a restaurant
- ?? Having the local preacher over for lunch
- ?? Taking food to a potluck
- ?? Meeting at the park to play Ultimate Frisbee with your brethren
- ?? Putting the gospel meeting preacher up in a hotel

Keep in mind, the question is not which of these are good works. The question is not which of these are things we can or even should do. The question is which of these actually line up with the definition of the words translated “hospitality” in the Bible. This was actually a trick question. The fact is, none of these options fit. A couple of them lean toward hospitality. One in particular is certainly tied to hospitality in the scriptures. However, none of them are actually what the words translated hospitality mean. I have titled this lesson “The Lost Art of Christian Service” because as I studied this topic, I realized that I didn’t really know what hospitality is. I fear Christians in general are losing the meaning of the word. To be honest with you, I have most often equated hospitality with spending time with other Christians. Because I regularly go out to eat with brethren, I have thought I was pretty hospitable. The problem, because I didn’t really know what hospitality was, I saw myself as fulfilling a principle of God that I wasn’t actually fulfilling. That worries me for Christians in general. If we forget what this word means, we will eventually no longer perform it and yet convince ourselves we are. In this lesson, I don’t want to draw any lines for you. I don’t want to tell you what you have to do to be hospitable. I simply want to share with you what I have learned about hospitality. I hope this will provide a starting point for your own study to help you figure out where you might need to improve in hospitality and related works of Christian service. What I want to do is simply share with you the definition of hospitality and the related verses that will help us understand what God is asking. Then I want to look at the importance of hospitality. Finally, I want to list some things I think hinder us from hospitality and some practical ways to be hospitable.

### Discussion:

#### I. Defining “hospitality.”

##### A. Words translated “hospitality”

1. *Philoxenos* (**I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; I Peter 4:9**) or *Philoxenia* (**Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2**): These words come from the combining of two words. The first is “philos” which means a friend or a companion. From this word we get the word “phileo” meaning affection. The second is “xenos,” which is a stranger. These words for “hospitality” do not simply mean to be nice or have folks in your home. They mean to treat strangers the way you do friends.
2. *Xenodocheo* (**I Timothy 5:10**): This word also comes from the combination of two words. The first is “xenos,” which we have already seen means stranger. The second is “dechomai,” which means to receive. Thus, this phrase means to welcome strangers into your home. The KJV of **I Timothy 5:10** actually translates it to have “lodged strangers.”
3. The Biblical definition of the terms translated hospitality were not just about spending time with other Christians. They weren’t even about having our friends and relatives into our homes. Rather, they were about opening our homes to strangers. We can contrast these two words with another word you might have heard that has made it into our English language—xenophobia. Xenophobia is fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers. Instead of fearing or hating those who are strangers to us, we receive and welcome them with the open arms of Christian love, care and service.
4. Interestingly, the etymology of our word “hospital” demonstrates this very concept. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “hospital” was originally “a house or hostel for

the reception and entertainment of pilgrims, travelers and strangers.” Over time, the word came to mean “a charitable institution for the housing and maintenance of the needy.” Of course, in our day “hospital” has been restricted to an institution for the housing and maintenance of the sick and medically needy.

- B. Digging a little deeper, I want to share with you some passages that use the root words we have uncovered in the sense of hospitality and just let you notice what they meant.
1. While “xenos” basically means strangers. It was sometimes used to refer to those who played host to strangers. Consider Gaius who was host to Paul and the entire church in **Romans 16:23**. Here was a man who was friendly to and received strangers. He hosted Paul, that is he allowed Paul to lodge with him.
  2. “Dechomai” demonstrates an even stronger meaning in regard to hospitality. Consider the passages below and how they impact our understanding of hospitality.
    - a. **Matthew 10:40**—“Whoever *receives* you *receives* me, and whoever *receives* me *receives* him who sent me” (ESV).
    - b. **Matthew 18:5**—“Whoever *receives* one such child in my name *receives* me” (ESV).
    - c. **Luke 10:8**—“Whenever you enter a town and they *receive* you, eat what is set before you” (ESV).
    - d. **Luke 16:4**—“I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may *receive* me into their houses.”
    - e. **Hebrews 11:31**—“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had *given a friendly welcome* to the spies” (ESV).
    - f. Notice from these verses the connection between receiving and caring for others, lodging others, hosting others, feeding others.
- C. With all this in mind, we begin to see a picture. Hospitality, in the Bible was not merely Christians spending time together. It was not even friends inviting friends into their homes. Those are good things, things which must be done. But hospitality was primarily the welcome reception into our homes of and caring for strangers, especially those in some kind of need. Having said that, I will share that I don’t believe this command mandates picking up any Tom, Dick or Harry off the street and having them spend the night (though that would certainly still be hospitality). However, note some other passages that show this hospitality in action.
1. **III John 3-6** describes how brethren who were strangers came to the recipients of John’s letter. The care John describes here is a picture of hospitality. Receiving, welcoming and caring for strangers.
  2. In **Matthew 25:35**, Jesus praises those Christians who saw strangers and took them in. Notice **vs. 40** however, that they were doing this to “the least of these my brothers.”
  3. We see a great example of hospitality, taking in strangers in **Acts 16:15** when Lydia prevailed upon Paul and Barnabas to stay in her home while they were in Philippi. She had only just met them that day but extended the invitation very much in the spirit of **Galatians 6:6**, the one who was taught sharing with the one who taught her.
  4. Consider also **Acts 10:6**, when Peter was “lodging” at Simon the Tanner’s house. The word translated “lodge” comes from the word “xenos” that we have already defined. What is even more amazing is when the messengers from Cornelius arrived at Simon’s, Simon did not send them away. Rather, they became his guests in **Acts 10:23**. The KJV says “he lodged them.”
  5. Similarly, **Acts 21:16** shows that Mnason would lodge Paul and his companions.
  6. Thus, in the main examples of hospitality, we do not see them just picking folks up off the street. The strangers were often brothers and sisters in Christ. Or there was a connection such as the messengers sent by Cornelius to get Peter.
  7. Having said all this, I do want to hone in on a practical point that concerns me about hospitality. Fifty years ago, no one would ever have put up a Gospel Meeting preacher in a hotel. As time goes on, that becomes increasingly commonplace. I’m not saying that is wrong. It is still a good thing and it provides for someone. But, brethren, we need to recognize putting the visiting preacher up in a hotel is not hospitality. I want to be very careful here, because I do not want to make any unwarranted accusations. However, I fear this scenario demon-

strates that with our increasing prosperity, we have moved away from the personal sacrifice that is hospitality, to be merely satisfied with throwing money at something.

- D. Finally, I really struggled as I looked at these definitions because I began to think that hospitality was something only about strangers because the word literally meant that. However, two points demonstrated that the principles of hospitality are also about us and our relationship with one another even within this congregation.
1. First, if the basis of hospitality means to treat strangers the way you do your friends and then encourages us to receive, lodge, feed and care for these strangers, it means God expects us to do the same for our friends. That means He assumed we would be doing that for each other and felt the need to encourage us to do it for Christians who were not friends but were strangers. How could we ever say we would be friendly and receptive to strangers if we won't even do that to our friends?
  2. Then there was **I Peter 4:9**. "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (ESV). Peter clearly commands us to show hospitality to each other. In other words, even during Bible days Christians needed to be reminded that loving the brethren they knew meant receiving them into their homes, feeding them, lodging them, caring for them especially in their needs.

## II. The importance of hospitality.

- A. Once again, I just want to share with you some passages that have impacted me as I considered the importance of hospitality. I don't want to use them to tell you what to do or how much of it you need to do. Rather, you take these verses and let them be a jumping off point for your own study and practice of hospitality.
- B. According to **I Timothy 3:2** and **Titus 1:8**, a man who will not welcome folks into his home, receiving them, treating strangers as he does his friends is not qualified to be an elder. Think about that, Brothers. We spend so much time arguing over "faithful children" and "husband of one wife" I think we might overlook this. Only the hospitable are considered mature Christians and therefore qualified to shepherd the flock of God.
- C. According to **I Timothy 5:10**, a woman who had not practiced hospitality could not be placed on the church's role to care for widows in need. Think about that, Sisters. In our day and age of Social Security, pensions and retirement funds, this may not seem so important. But Paul's point was only those sisters who had cared for others through hospitality when they were able were allowed to be cared for in the daily ministrations of the local church.
- D. **Matthew 25:34-40** claims our salvation is based on hospitality. Those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, visited the sick and took in the strangers enter into heaven. Those who do not are cast aside into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (**Matthew 25:41**).
- E. **Luke 7:36-50** presents an amazing contrast. Simon the Pharisee hospitably invited Jesus into his home to feed him. However, despite that act, Jesus rebuked him for not being hospitable enough. He gave no greeting. He did not serve Jesus. The sinful woman, however, was uplifted because of her hospitable spirit that went to the extreme of washing Jesus' feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. Jesus said she would be forgiven but Simon would not.
- F. Brothers and Sisters, we need to recognize that hospitality is the essence of what it means to be Christian. It is at the heart of what it means to love others. It is the root of **Galatians 6:9-10** which says we must do good as we have opportunity, especially to those of the household of God. We must not replace hospitality by throwing money at it. We must not replace individual Christian hospitality by having the church provide for people. If we are going to be Christians, we must be hospitable or we will be lost.

## III. Hindrances to hospitality.

- A. Why do so many struggle with hospitality? Why doesn't it come naturally?
1. *Because hospitality equals sacrifice, when we so often want to preserve.* Being hospitable means giving my food, giving up my room, giving up my bed. It means giving up my space and my time. Hospitality means sacrifice. It is no wonder it is part of litany of instruction that follows Paul's statement that we are to be living sacrifices (**Romans 12:1, 13**).
  2. *Because hospitality equals service, when we so often want to be served.* Simon fell short because he invited Jesus into his home, but refused to serve him. The sinful woman was ex-

trepreneur in her service to Jesus even though it wasn't her home. Hospitality will only become natural when we follow Jesus, being here to serve and not to be served (**Matthew 20:28**).

3. *Because hospitality takes humility, when we are too often proud.* Think again of the sinful woman in **Luke 7:36-50**. She is the epitome of hospitality. While the example does not mandate we wash each other's feet with our tears and dry them off with our hair, it does demonstrate the humility it takes to be a servant. Simon fell short because he was proud. If we want to make hospitality a virtue, we must remove the pride that says we will not have anyone in our home unless it is spotless. We will remove the pride that says I don't have to do this. We will remove the pride that is willing to be invited but will do no inviting. We will remove the pride that says serving others is for those who are less than we are. We must clothe ourselves in humility toward one another (**I Peter 5:5**).
  4. *Because hospitality makes us vulnerable, when we want to maintain a wall of protection.* The example in **Acts 10:23** of Simon the Tanner receiving Cornelius' messengers to lodge and be his guests is amazing to me. Who knew what kind of men these were? Who knew how they might take advantage of Simon? Yet, he allowed the vulnerability. Things get broken when we are hospitable. Carpet gets stained when we are hospitable. People take advantage when we are hospitable. The fact that some folks make mistakes and some folks even sin does not change the need for hospitality, especially between brethren.
  5. *Because hospitality means intimacy, when we prefer privacy.* We are Americans. We have our independence and we have our privacy. Our home is our castle and no one should be allowed to invade. We don't want them in our personal space. We don't want folks getting too close. Hospitality violates these American rules of independence and privacy. Hospitality is about intimacy and connection. It is about love. **I Peter 4:8-9** demonstrates the connection between love and hospitality. We know from **I Corinthians 13:5** that love does not seek its own. Love seeks what is best for others.
- B. Let's face it; hospitality is a scary thing. The more we open ourselves to others, especially those we don't know very well, the more they might take advantage of us. We need to remember this: No one ever went to hell for being taken advantage of. But folks will go to hell for being inhospitable (cf. **Matthew 25:41, 46**).

#### IV. Some practical ways to be hospitable.

- A. Let a visiting preacher stay in your home.
- B. Feed a visiting preacher, especially do so in your own home.
- C. Invite guests to our assemblies to your home for lunch or dinner.
- D. Invite new members into your home.
- E. When brothers and sisters have too many friends visiting to lodge them all, invite some into your home.
- F. Remember we are to be hospitable to one another. Invite each other into our homes.
- G. Let brothers and sisters stay in your home when they are in need.

#### Conclusion:

Frankly, this study frightened me. It caused me to realize as hospitable as I thought I was, I fall far short. I didn't even really know what hospitality meant. Let's not let hospitality truly become the lost art of Christian service. Let's make it something we practice with one another. Let's make it something we extend to those who come into our midst. Let's find hospitality and practice it without complaint.