

Reformed Congregational Fellowship, 2019  
*Savoy Declaration of Faith*, Chapters 26 & 27: Of the Church; Of the Communion of Saints  
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### The Discipline of Hospitality

*All Saints are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities: which communion, though especially to be exercised by them in the relations wherein they stand, whether in families or churches, yet as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the Name of the Lord Jesus. — Savoy Declaration, 27.2*

The above doctrine from the Savoy Declaration of Faith appears to have received its impetus from the following language of the apostle Peter:

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11 )<sup>1</sup>*

Peter exhorts us to see ourselves as those who have something to contribute to the health and strength of the church. He notes that we receive gifts as stewards, those who oversee the property of another in order to bring the owner a good return. He teaches that our being faithful to serve with the gift that God has given will bring the return that God desires, namely, “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” These exhortations are placed within a paragraph that encourages several Christian virtues in the light of Christ’s return. “The end of all things is at hand,” he teaches, therefore, be self-controlled, sober-minded, exercise mutual,

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<sup>1</sup> All scriptures from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers) 2001

persevering, patient, empathetic, and earnest love, and “show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” What is to be noted, and I suspect is under appreciated, is the place of hospitality among the Christian virtues to be pursued in the light of Christ’s return. “The end of all things is at hand, therefore ... show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

This particular virtue, that of practicing hospitality, when closely examined proves to be an important component of the Christian life. Consider the qualifications for one who would serve as an elder in the church:

“If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers, not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination, for an overseer as God’s steward must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy word is taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:6-9)<sup>2</sup>

As he outlines the expectations for one who would exercise oversight over God’s people, Paul instructs that the man must have a handle on his sinful behavior, be able to understand and explicate the Word of God, nurture his wife and children, have a good reputation and — be hospitable. This suggests that hospitality should be pursued as an integral component of a mature Christian walk.

It is not unusual for Christians to be involved in some expression of an accountability group. The practice in such groups is to openly share how the members of the group are doing, inquiring about how each is engaging various Christian disciplines. The dialogue might go something like the this:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf., 1 Timothy 3:1-7

“So, what have you been reading in the Bible this week? What has the Lord been showing you?”

“Well, I had a great time of study the other morning as I really began to understand just how much God really wants us to embrace the notion that each of us has been given gifts with which we can serve the church.”

“That’s great. Convicting, right? But also very exciting.”

“It is. How’s your prayer life going?”

“Not so great this week. This week I kind of just didn’t find the time.”

“I know what you mean. I need to make it a priority and not an afterthought. Well, by God’s grace, we can do better next week. And how have you been doing with that particular temptation in your life?”

“You know what? I was able to walk away from it this week. It was tough, but but the Holy Spirit met me and I was able to walk away.”

“Praise God! That’s a victory! And what about hospitality? Did you extend hospitality to anyone this week?”

I do not think including hospitality an overstep. Numbering it among the disciplines exercised in the pursuit of Christian maturity is biblically well supported. The following the language from Romans 12 bears this out:

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” (Romans 12:9-13)

In this case, the exhortation to extend hospitality is found in the midst of Paul’s description of the kind of life that ought to arise from the gospel, a message he has gone to great lengths to explain in the chapters leading up to this passage. He urges in the opening words of the chapter, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God I beg you to present

yourselves as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.” He then goes on to encourage humility as well as diligence in the use of divinely-supplied gifts for the building up of the body. This is followed by this relationally oriented passage that includes the call for hospitality, a passage that the editors of the *English Standard Version* saw fit to title “Marks of the True Christian.”

Most likely, when a contemporary Christian hears the call for hospitality he or she thinks of having friends or family over to share a meal and a pleasant evening. While such activities would certainly be included, biblically the notion is broader and more demanding. Virtually every translation of the New Testament renders as hospitality, *philoxenia*, a compound word which joins together *philos* and *xenos*, ‘love’ and ‘stranger.’

Love and care for the stranger has deep biblical roots. In the Old Testament there is the repeated command from Yahweh for just and generous treatment of aliens.<sup>3</sup> Most often referred to by the Hebrew term *gēr*, foreigners were subject to mistreatment, “being frequently associated with other groups subject to exploitation: servants, hirelings, the needy, the poor, orphans and widows.” Yahweh was not pleased, however, and he instructed Israel that her own history was to inform their relationship with the stranger. “Repeatedly Israel was reminded that their own

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<sup>3</sup> e.g., Leviticus 19:33-34, “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God; Leviticus 23:22, “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.”

attitude toward the *gērîm* was to be tempered by the memory of their own experience in Egypt . . . They were not to treat the outsider as they were treated.”<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, the judgment scene from Matthew 25 is often cited as advocating kindness for the stranger.<sup>5</sup> Jesus names as “sheep” those who acted compassionately toward the outsider: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Though these passages are rightly interpreted as advocating just and generous treatment of the stranger, it is important to note that their focus is narrower than often asserted. In the Old Testament obligations toward the outsider were not the same for every category of alien:

“The Israelites recognized several categories of outsiders, depending on the degree of identification of the alien with the covenant community. The *gēr*, and perhaps the *tôšāb* as well, tended to represent those aliens who chose voluntarily to identify with Israel as completely as possible, including a commitment to their national deity and their spiritual values. By contrast, the *noḵrî* / *benê nēḵār* and the *zār* were usually those who resided in Israel and/or had political contacts with Israel, but who refused a closer association. Consequently, Israel was able to receive the former legitimately, but acceptance of the latter was forbidden.”<sup>6</sup>

As the above instructs, not all aliens were treated alike. Only those who chose to identify with Israel “as completely as possible” were to be welcomed among the covenant community. The expected just and generous treatment of the alien may provide a principle of inclusion, but the conditions for inclusion were particular and the welcome not universal.

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<sup>4</sup> D.I. Block. “Sojourner; Alien; Stranger.” In *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geoffrey W. Bromley, ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) 561.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:31-46.

<sup>6</sup> Block, *ISBE*, 563.

When, in Matthew 25, Jesus is asked by those he approves when they had ever directly ministered to him, he responds, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”<sup>7</sup> The marshaling of this text for universal hospitality appears to rest on the belief that Jesus identifies himself with any stranger, therefore accounting those being ministered to his “brothers.” But can we look to Matthew 25 for support of those in distress no matter who they are?

Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus defines those he calls brothers. When told that his mother and brothers (most naturally understood to be his immediate family) were waiting to speak with him, Matthew records, “. . . stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” Additionally, Matthew’s post-resurrection account has Jesus instructing the women who “took hold of his feet and worshiped him” to “not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul, speaking of the confidence the Christian can have in the face of suffering, relates God’s purpose for such travail, “. . . those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn

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<sup>7</sup> vv. 35, 36, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 12:49-50; 28:9-10; see also Mark 3:34; John 20:17. Additional considerations from Matthew include Jesus speaking of the reward for those who treat his disciples with kindness: “whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42), and those who believe in him as being recipients of special revelation: “I thank you, Father . . . that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” (Matthew 11:25) See also Acts 9:4 where Jesus equates Saul’s persecution of Jesus’ disciples as persecuting him.

among many brothers.”<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, the writer of Hebrews speaks of the sanctifying work of God that declares Christians to be brothers of the one who came to “taste death.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the broad use of Matthew 25 to urge compassion for all strangers,<sup>11</sup> the textual evidence in Matthew, and the use of the term ‘brothers’ elsewhere in the New Testament, prevents us from equating Jesus with all unfortunate aliens, intimating a universal “brotherhood” of all strangers and sufferers with Christ. There are alternative ways to understand *xenos*, and ones more suited to the context: “Terms for ‘stranger’ or ‘foreigner’ are often based on geographical differences or upon lack of previous knowledge. For example, ‘I was a stranger’ may be rendered as ‘I came from another country’ or ‘I was not known to any of you.’”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that those Jesus commends, the “sheep,” are the ones who treated his disciples compassionately despite the fact that they were not previously known to them, or were from a different “tribe and language and people and nation.”<sup>13</sup> As Craig A. Evans relates, “The ministrations described in these verses reveal the desperate straits in which many found themselves in late antiquity, especially those who were persecuted, driven out of the synagogue, and hunted down by pagan authorities.” Consequently, at the judgment, “The compassion and care that people show for Jesus’ disciples provide the proof of their righteousness and

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:29.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 2:10-12. ““For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.”

<sup>11</sup> Drawing upon “the least of these” in this passage, it is commonly used to motivate pro-life activism as well.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A Nida, ed. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Vol. 1* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 132.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 5:9.

sincerity.”<sup>14</sup> One cannot ignore a needy fellow disciple and call oneself a follower of Jesus for “the Son of God holds them as dear as his own members.”<sup>15</sup>

Though there is a primacy of care expected for those of the “household of faith,” we are to “do good to everyone.”<sup>16</sup> In the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>17</sup> we discover an additional obligation, and one that brings us into the orbit of being ready to extend hospitality to anyone in need. R. C. Sproul comments, “There is a popular distortion of Christianity that teaches the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. However, the central meaning of brotherhood and fatherhood in the New Testament refers to those who are the adopted children of God.” Sproul goes on to acknowledge, however, that though the Bible “does not teach a universal brotherhood of man . . . it does teach a universal *neighbourhood* of man.”<sup>18</sup> The foundation of this teaching is the second half of the “summation” of the law referenced by the lawyer in the encounter with Jesus that prompted the famous parable: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>19</sup> As the story illustrates, our obligation is not limited to just those who chose to identify with our tribe.

Significantly, Jesus raises the stakes of hospitality by including a Samaritan in the story.

When the lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” he is reflecting the contemporaneously held view

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<sup>14</sup> Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 468. Those who are cast out, the “goats,” are those disapproved of in passages such as 1 John 3:14-18 and James 2:14-18.

<sup>15</sup> J. Calvin and W. Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. 3*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010). 181.

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 6:10

<sup>17</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>18</sup> R.C. Sproul, [A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke](#). (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999). 228, emphasis and spelling in original

<sup>19</sup> Leviticus 19:18.

that a Jew was responsible to help other Jews, but were not obligated outside of that circle. The Essenes went further. They “taught that one was to love all the children of light who are part of the community but to hate the children of darkness who stand outside the community.”<sup>20</sup> But Jesus transgresses such social barriers. He includes a Samaritan. Robert H. Stein asserts, “Jesus deliberately chose an outsider, and a hated one at that, for his hero in order to indicate that being a neighbor is not a matter of nationality or race.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus’ “go and do likewise” at the close of the pericope is a powerful reversal of the intent of the lawyer. While the lawyer sought to restrict the scope of obligation, Jesus illustrates that “the issue is not the limits on one’s obligation but the wide extent of one’s opportunity to love the neighbor in need.”<sup>22</sup> In truth, “I am required to love *each* human being as much as I love myself.”<sup>23</sup>

Though it is suggested above that contemporary believers are likely unaware of the importance and extent of hospitality, this was not so in the first centuries of the church. Christine D. Pohl relates that in the early church, “several aspects of . . . Christian life combined to make hospitality central to Christian practice.” She asserts that “meals were a significant setting for struggling with cultural boundaries in the early church.”<sup>24</sup> They “provided the context for instructions on equal recognition and respect. Hospitality practices in the Christian community

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<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke, New American Commentary. Vol. 24.* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 316.

<sup>21</sup> Stein. *Luke*, 317-8.

<sup>22</sup> *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* R.C. Sproul, ed. (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015) 1808.

<sup>23</sup> Sproul, *Walk*, 228. emphasis added

<sup>24</sup> This was certainly the case as churches worked through the inclusion of Gentiles among the covenant community.

were to portray a clear message — that of equality, transformed relations, and a common life.” Additionally, as the gospel message was carried from Jerusalem to the ‘ends of the earth,’ hospitality became a vital aspect of the mission: “Hospitality to those first missionaries and the reception of the message were very closely connected. From a hospitable household base in a city, the message spread. Hospitality was the practice within which early Christians met the needs of traveling missionaries and leaders, religious exiles, and the local poor.” Lastly, Pohl reports, “the early church regularly met for worship in the households of a believer. In such a location, hospitality was a natural and necessary practice. It helped to foster family-like ties among believers and provided a setting in which to shape and to reinforce a new identity.” She concludes, “Writings from the first five centuries demonstrate the importance of hospitality in defining the church as a universal community, in denying the significance of the status boundaries and distinctions of the larger society, in recognizing the value of every person and in providing practical care for the poor, stranger, and sick.”<sup>25</sup>

With Pohl’s conclusion in mind it is profitable to consider the interplay of hospitality and Paul’s appeal to his friend Philemon to receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus, “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.”<sup>26</sup> Did Philemon, and the church that met in his house, readily welcome Onesimus as a fellow heir of eternal life?<sup>27</sup> Certainly, to the society in which they lived, Onesimus was considered more property than person, and his transgression

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<sup>25</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999) 31-33

<sup>26</sup> Philemon 16

<sup>27</sup> Galatians 3:27-29, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

of Roman law and social mores deserved harsh punishment, even death. It is no wonder that Paul tells Philemon that he has been praying that “the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” His friend was going to be challenged to enlarge his already well-developed sense of *koinonia*. One can envision the shock waves sent out from that epicenter of cultural upheaval if Onesimus was allowed to share the table rather than serve it.

So far, an attempt has been made to demonstrate the biblical and historic practice of hospitality in the hope that it will be seen as a vital component of the life of the Christian. In addition to its potential practical and cultural effects, what else is reflected in the practice? First, it models that we understand the gospel. It recognizes the fact that through the grace of God we who were strangers are now “brought near.” Paul writes,

“Remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh . . . you were at that time separated from Christ even from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers of the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you, who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for through Him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”<sup>28</sup>

Not unlike the call for Israel to extend hospitality because they understood what it was like to be an outsider, our hospitality can be a practical outworking of our having been “brought near,” the result of which is that we are now in union with Christ and his people. It is the unity of our shared faith that begins to get at the heart of why we are to extend hospitality to one another — it embodies that we were mutual strangers apart from God but now we are one in Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 2:11-13

This same experience can be drawn upon to extend hospitality to the non-Christian as well. For those outside of one's 'camp' there is a tendency to dehumanize, but love for the stranger, offered from humility, begins to break down tension that exists between the believer and non-believer. Following are reflections of Rosaria Butterfield regarding her experience of Christian hospitality. Butterfield was a tenured professor at Syracuse University. She was a feminist, published scholar in queer theory and postmodern thought. She was very active as the faculty advisor for various gay/lesbian organizations that were on campus. Additionally, she had been in a relationship with another woman for a long time.

She had published something in the local paper that prompted Ken, a Christian pastor, to write her a letter. She found it to be very different from most of the ones she received. Others tended to be vitriolic and attacking, Ken's just asked questions. "Why do you think like you do?" "What is it that makes you think that there isn't a God?" His tone intrigued her to the point of being unable get rid of his letter. She relates, "I hate a messy desk, one where papers litter the surface. Pastor Ken's letter sat on my desk for a whole week — this is six days longer than I can normally stand. It really bothered me that I didn't know where to file it. I threw it away a few times but always found myself digging through the department's recycling bin to reclaim it at the day's end."

But what Ken did to deepen the relationship was to have her over to his home. Rosaria relates:

We had a nice chat on the phone. And Pastor Ken invited me to dinner at his house to explore some of these questions. Before we ended our phone call, almost as an afterthought, Pastor Ken also said that if I was afraid to come over to some stranger's home, that he and his wife would meet me at a restaurant. I thought that was very considerate of him. Almost chivalrous. I was comfortable with the idea of going to his

house. The gay and lesbian community is also a community “given to hospitality”. I honed my hospitality gifts serving pasta to drag queens and queers, people like me. My lesbian identity and culture and its values mattered a lot to me. I came to my culture and its values through life experience but also through much research and deep thinking. I liked Ken and Floy immediately because they seemed sensitive to that. Even while, obviously, these Christians and I were very different, they seemed to know I wasn’t just a blank slate, that I had values and opinions too. They walked with me and they talked with me in a way that didn’t make me feel erased. The most memorable part of this meal was Ken’s prayer before the meal. I’d never heard anyone pray to God as if God cared, as if God listened, as if God answered. It was not a pretentious prayer uttered for the heathen at the table to overhear. It was a private and an honest utterance and I felt as though I was treading on something real, something sincere, something important, and something transparent, but illegible to me. Ken made himself vulnerable to me in his prayer by humbling himself before his God and I took note of that. During our meal I remember holding my breath and waiting to be punched in the stomach with something grossly offensive. It never happened.

In retrospect Rosaria understands that,

Ken and Floy did something at the meal that had a long Christian history but has been functionally lost in too many Christian homes. Ken and Floy invited the stranger in, not to scapegoat me but to listen and to learn and to dialogue. Ken and Floy have a vulnerable and transparent faith. We didn’t debate worldview, we talked about our personal truth and about what made us tick. Ken and Floy didn’t identify with me, they listened to me and identified with Christ. They were willing to walk the long journey to me in Christian compassion. During our meal, they did not share the Gospel with me and after our meal they did not invite me to church. Because of these glaring omissions to the Christian script as I had come to know it, when the evening ended and Pastor Ken said he wanted to stay in touch, I knew it was safe to accept his open hand.<sup>29</sup>

Butterfield’s experience offers a powerful example to the importance of hospitality in the Christian life. It communicates that we understand that we, strangers though we were, have been brought near by the grace of God.

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<sup>29</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. (Crown & Covenant Publications: 2012) Kindle Edition. Location 263

Secondly, I am going to suggest that it serves to advance the Gospel. We saw earlier that hospitality was an important means by which itinerant preachers were materially supported in their ministry. Listen to this language from the third letter of John:

“I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testify to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God for they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”<sup>30</sup>

We are so used to hotels dotting the landscape, that this need seems superfluous. Do you know that by the end of 2019, there will be 133,500 hotel rooms available in New York City?<sup>31</sup> That’s not the way it was in ancient Palestine. The inns were few and far between. To further complicate the issue, in that culture a stranger was viewed as an enemy. Colin Kruse writes, “the presence of a stranger in a community in the first century Mediterranean world was not a welcome sight. Strangers had no standing in law or custom and therefore needed a patron in the community they were visiting. There was no universal brotherhood in the ancient Mediterranean world. They were therefore seen as a threat.”<sup>32</sup> The church, therefore, was expected to show hospitality.

Though we might not be as familiar with the practice as our ancient brothers and sisters, opening up our homes defrays costs for traveling missionaries or other church workers. It is a means by which we serve to advance the gospel. Doug Wilson declares, “This is Kingdom work!

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<sup>30</sup> 3 John 5-8

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/hotel\\_industry\\_nyc\\_rpt2\\_2017.pdf](https://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/hotel_industry_nyc_rpt2_2017.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Colin G. Kruse. *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012)

The Bible teaches that hospitality is an important way to advance the work of the Kingdom of God and so if we pray for God's Kingdom to come we must be willing to open our doors to invite it in." And quoting 3 John 8: "We therefore ought to receive such so that we may become workers for the truth."

As noted, emphasizing hospitality reflects that we know the Gospel and in the light of that reality we are extending ourselves to bring others "near." We also demonstrate that we understand that as we practice hospitality, particularly for those who are doing the work of the Kingdom, we are working to advance the gospel. But an additional outcome of practicing hospitality is our sanctification.

We have noted already how hospitality worked to break down social barriers in the early church, and that would certainly have had a sanctifying effect on those involved. But Peter's admonition, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling," brings this aspect of hospitality up to the present day. Why would one grumble at opening up his or her home to others? In everyday circumstances it might be because he or she felt put upon or forced to do it. But perhaps the most prevalent reason why people might offer hospitality with a grumbling spirit is because they are having to offer hospitality to people with whom they might not choose to spend time.

Peter's letter is understood to have gone out to a number of churches, and he is wise and experienced enough to know that he is speaking to gatherings of some very disparate people. Listen to how Paul describes a church in 1 Corinthians 6: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor

drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God, and *such as were some of you!*” Or this portrait from chapter 1 of the same letter: “Consider your calling, brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, weak in the world to shame the strong. What is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” It’s not as if people, including Christians, come into the church poised, emotionally stable, ready to give, openhearted, humble, and generous. To the contrary, people, including Christians, come from of all kinds of backgrounds and histories. For the Christian, that which unites us is our shared faith in Christ; we have all been strangers together apart from God. But now, by his grace, we are brought into a relationship with people who bring with them baggage, just as we have brought our own baggage.

In truth, if we begin to extend ourselves in hospitality we will do so for people with whom we will likely have little in common. We will probably not share the same tastes in food, music, or entertainment. We might not have been equally educated, or well-read, or come from the same economic status. All this Peter knows and he anticipates the dynamic of the local church. He appreciates the fact that when he is calling people to extend hospitality, there is going to be opportunity for grumbling. Again, from Doug Wilson: “Hospitality frequently uncovers a multitude of sins . . . . An ungrateful guest with muddy boots and querulous questions about ‘what’s for dinner’ can inspire a host of unlovely thoughts in the mind of an abused hostess. And this is why Peter tell us to be hospitable without grumbling. God loves a cheerful giver, and if you share your home with a bad attitude, you have the worst of every situation. No treasure in heaven, and a lousy evening to boot.”

Becoming hospitable to one another is something that is expected of us, and yet we know it is a challenge. But when Peter exhorts us “show hospitality to one another without grumbling,” he also says that “as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the very grace of God. Whoever speaks is one who speaks the oracles of God, whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies.” The need for God’s empowerment, the grace that God gives for all of these other means by which we strengthen the body, equally applies to the necessity of showing hospitality. If the notion of opening up your home to someone with whom you have little in common except your like faith in Christ, is something which gives you pause, and yet you go ahead and do it anyway and as the evening rolls on you find yourself asking, “Why did I ever do this?” you can remember that “each has received a gift” to use in service of one another: “whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.” Such enablement is available for being hospitable, even at its most challenging.

Lastly, how can we practice hospitality? Two things are foundational: preparation and intention. If we know that we are to be ready to practice hospitality then we will prepare our schedules and our back accounts accordingly. Too often our lives are filled with activities and demands that leave little room for hospitality. Spontaneity in welcoming or readiness to help requires emotional and temporal space. It is often the case that someone who is in *need* of hospitality is in that state due to some constraint in the person’s life. Such circumstances often require an immediate response. Leaving space in our lives for others will help us to be ready should a need arise. Additionally, hospitality can demand something of our resources. Choosing to live in a manner that leaves funds available to serve others brings its own dividends. The

riches of sharing your table or home with others may prove to be more satisfying than the next non-necessary purchase or additional form of entertainment. Hospitality does not have to cost a lot, but it will cost something.

The other foundational element in intention. In the previously considered passage from chapter 12 of Romans, Paul directs, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” (v. 13) The Greek term, *dioko*, translated in the ESV as “seek,” betrays stronger intention than the somewhat mild rendering in the ESV. *dioko* is employed in a number of ways in Scripture, but the term consistently communicates strong action: “to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away; to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after; to press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, animated by *dioko*, there is intentionality to hospitality. As one observer has suggested: “The saints are told to pursue hospitality, to chase down potential guests in the parking lot after church. Far more is involved than a simple willingness to have company over. Paul is saying to make it a point to make it happen.”

A hypothetical situation might serve to bring these two ideas together. If your church is located near a college or university, you can reasonably expect that come September you could have several students newly arrived to your town who visit your church. It would be in keeping with the expectations of hospitality to be ready for them when they come. When they show up, lovingly pursue them. Invite them into your home, or take them out to lunch or dinner. Extend hospitality. By doing this, you begin to break down the strangeness of their experience. You begin to humanize them for they cannot remain a faceless student. You get to know their name,

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<sup>33</sup> διώκω , Olive Tree Enhanced Strong’s Dictionary, g1377

learn something about them and, in turn, they begin to know something about you. Through hospitality a connection begins to be established. And assuming that they are fellow Christians, then you have begun to express the unity that exists just by the fact that you both confess Christ as savior and Lord. If they are not, you are demonstrating that you know what it's like to be welcomed.

Perhaps you are in a more agricultural setting that anticipates the arrival of migrant workers come harvest time. The same sort of intentionality can be undertaken. In this case, it is likely that cultural and language barriers might have to be overcome. But with thought and preparation, a welcome can be offered that brings the one far off, near.

I close with a portion of Psalm 84: The psalmist sings:

How lovely is your dwelling place,

O Lord of hosts!

My soul longs, yes, faints

for the courts of the Lord;

my heart and flesh sing for joy

to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home,

and the swallow a nest for herself,

where she may lay her young,

at your altars, O Lord of hosts,

my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise! <sup>34</sup>

An allusion, of course, to the temple, but seen as a place that God opens so that we might dwell with him, share his presence. This something that we are to reflect in our lives by opening up our homes, lives, and wallets, in order to extend hospitality, in order to break down the estrangement that inherently exists between strangers. When we begin to extend hospitality, we begin to humanize one another. As has been argued, the Scriptures teach that hospitality is meant to be practiced for brothers and sisters in Christ. Even though they may be strangers, they are fellow children of God. And going a step further, we are to make ourselves available to those who are not Christians so that we provide an opportunity for them to experience the love of the one who welcomed us when we were aliens and strangers.

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<sup>34</sup> Psalm 84:1-4