

HOSPITALITY

Texts: Romans 12:13; I Peter 4:8, 9

INTRODUCTION: Here is a great subject that is not often handled from the pulpit and still less practiced in the pew. This is a pertinent and important doctrinal issue. Four different times in the New Testament Scriptures it talks about the responsibility to practice this doctrinal art. In Romans 12:4 it is starting to talk about the spiritual gifts of the members of the body; the things we need to do as a church body. Now look at Romans 12:13. In I Timothy 3:1-2 we have the rules, the prerequisites, the stipulations regarding one that rules the house of God. A bishop must be given to hospitality. God thinks this is very important. In Titus 1:8 we are told that a bishop, a pastor must love hospitality. I Peter 4:8, 9 warns us to use hospitality without begrudging it one to another. Do it willingly and cheerfully, in other words. But perhaps the most forceful words on this subject comes from the pen of John, who commends the beloved Gaius for his hospitality and charity to traveling evangelists and preachers who had gone forth in the Savior's Name (Notice III John 7, 8).

These four times the word "hospitality" is used in the New Testament. But it was not devised in the New Testament. It was taken from the Old Testament and brought forward. You would have to go back to the beginning to find its origin. Now, the understanding of this principle seems to be very limited. There are two problems because of our limited understanding. 1) It hinders our ability to maintain righteousness (there are two types of sin – the sin of commission and the sin of omission). Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Our ignorance of this principle, this doctrine of hospitality hinders our ability to be right with God. 2) It also hinders our ability to understand the scriptural passages that deal with hospitality.

Let's go to Job 31:16-23 (Job is the oldest book in the Bible). Do you see how important hospitality is? We will demonstrate it more clearly in the New Testament but it stems from Old Testament teaching. To eat alone when others were in need, showed an attitude of selfishness toward God's blessings and a refusal to participate in God's welfare program.

I. HOSPITALITY

A. Let's consider our English understanding of the word "hospitality".

1. To the people that I see in the hospitals I kiddingly say, "You just are looking to get some attention. You just want to be waited on hand and foot."
2. When you go into the hospital you get attention. If you have a good hospital and nursing staff their goal is to take care of your every need.

3. From that stems our word hospital-tality – hospitality.

B. Why was hospitality such an important doctrine?

1. Because the guests were believed to be sent by God.
2. Therefore a person's responsibility toward their guests was the same as their responsibility toward God.
3. In the Middle-Eastern understanding of the laws of hospitality you would treat your guest as you would treat God.
4. If it is true that every one of the membership of this church family is here because God sent them here, do you begin to see your responsibility toward each other is as though it were from God and towards God?

C. Is this teaching of hospitality biblical?

1. Do you remember the parable Jesus told concerning the servants and the son in Matthew 21:33-46? The man anticipated that they would treat his servants and son as they would treat him.
2. Read Matthew 25:35-45. When you understand this, guests become a sacred duty and responsibility.
3. In Genesis 18 we find the story where Abraham entertained the three persons of the Godhead.
 - a. See, you watched for someone to entertain, you looked for an opportunity to be hospitable.
 - b. If God anticipated you would treat every guest the way you would treat Him, wouldn't you watch for an opportunity to serve God, to do something for God?
 - c. Could this be what the Scripture in Isaiah 40:31 deals with?
 - i. I had always thought it dealt with waiting on the Lord (folding your hands and sitting on them and waiting for Him to come).
 - ii. Maybe it is talking about throwing a towel over your arm and waiting upon the Lord—looking for an opportunity to do something for God!
 - iii. He will renew their strength; He does not need to renew the strength of the person sitting on his hands waiting. He does need to renew the strength of someone who has put on the apron of hospitality and the towel of service and is waiting on, or serving God!
 - iv. Would to God we could get more people to wait on, or serve God! We should try to be a blessing to Him instead of worrying so much about Him blessing us!

II. THREE AREAS OF GUESTS

A. Friends

1. The Romans in New Testament times had a token of hospitality between two friends. It consisted of a thin stone, piece of wood, or a piece of potsherd.
2. Something was used to carve in a name.
 - a. They would each write their name on one side, break it in half and exchange.
 - b. I would have your name and vice-versa.
3. The benefit of that would be a ticket into your house at anytime whether you were there or not.
4. You would be welcomed and treated like family. Those stones were passed from generation to generation.
5. Is this important to Scripture? Turn to Revelation 2.
 - a. I never understood this until I came across this Roman tradition that the Jews picked up quickly because of their laws of hospitality.
 - b. Revelation 2:17; Revelation 19:11, 12 – What name?
 - i. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ!
 - ii. God will receive me in the name of His Son!

B. Strangers

1. Jesus said what good is it if you only love and treat your friends well? (Matthew 6:46).
2. Strangers were to be treated well also.
3. An oriental proverb says "Every stranger is an invited guest."
4. Notice what Paul says in Hebrews 13:2. Why? Two reasons:
 - a. They could be angels.
 - b. So the people can be brought into the family of God. They need to come to a knowledge of salvation which is only found in Jesus.
5. **We need to be busy reaching strangers with the gospel!** (Servant Evangelism)
6. The word used here in Hebrews 13:2 for "*entertain*" (of strangers) comes from the same word in Romans 12:13 and it is different than the other three usages in the New Testament.
 - a. In the original Greek it is "*Phloxenia*."
 - b. It is the same prefix as Philadelphia or "*phileō*" which is love.

C. Enemies

1. This is a remarkable feature of the Middle-Eastern hospitality especially among the tent dwellers.

2. Their (the tent dwellers) hospitality was to extend to their rope stakes (their property line). That is where their hospitality began.
3. If you were the enemy and they failed to kill you before you got to the rope stakes, the laws of hospitality took over if you claimed them. Understand me now. This was used as the last attempt to reconcile.
 - a. You have done everything else you could to reconcile—nothing else could be done that you could see—but if you could just spend a couple of days with them across the table, you believe you could win them over to your side.
 - b. As long as you requested to be their guest you protection and provision became their responsibility as long as you were their guest.
 - c. That is why David could say in Psalm 23:5, “*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*” – because of the law of hospitality.
 - i. They had to provide food for you.
 - ii. They did not have to eat with you but he had to provide food for you.

III. THE SERVING OF THE MEAL

A. This sharing of food was a very special act.

1. The sharing of food under the Middle-Eastern laws of hospitality was a very special act – far more than it is in the West.
2. It was the way of making a covenant of peace and fidelity.
3. In Genesis 26, the confirmation of the covenant between Abimelech and Isaac came when they ate and drank at the feast.
4. The Middle-Eastern expression is “there is bread and salt between us.” We have eaten together; it has established a special bond, a special covenant.

B. Be careful who you make a covenant with though!

1. In Joshua 9 the Gibeonites heard Israel was coming into the land. They knew how God was destroying the enemies and they knew they were going to be next.
2. Now look at Joshua 9:3-5. Do not make a league a covenant with someone until you know who you are establishing a covenant with. Be careful who you commit yourself to.
3. Now look at Joshua 9:12-14. They did not ask counsel of God about sharing victuals with the enemy.
4. Now look at Joshua 9:15-20.

C. Where did this word “covenant” come from?

1. The word “*covenant*” comes from two Hebrew root words which mean together “to eat, to choose, and to divide” or “to choose, to divide, and eat”. That is what covenant means.
2. If I wanted to enter into a covenant with you I would choose to do so, divide the food, and sit down and eat with you.
3. This binding covenant of hospitality – remember it is as unto God. When you understand the laws of hospitality it all begins to fall into place.
4. Do you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37?
5. We just do not seem to fully realize what Paul told the church to do.

D. To break this covenant was an abhorrent sin.

1. Turn to Obadiah vs. 7 (Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obediah, Jonah, etc.).
2. Either this was a very dastardly deed or he did not understand the laws of hospitality.
3. Now notice Psalm 41:9. This became a Messianic Psalm when Jesus took it and applied it to Himself.
 - a. This was a double sin.
 - b. Not only did you break the laws of hospitality, but you broke the law of the covenant relationship that went along with it.
4. The sop was the best part of the meal. It was the special extension of friendship. But it was more than that. Look at John 13:18, 26.
 - a. Why did Jesus give Judas the sop? He was demonstrating the initiation in a covenant relationship.
 - b. How do I know my salvation is eternal?
 - i. He offered me the sop.
 - ii. Jesus offered me His own body and blood and I said “YES!”
 - c. I am in a covenant relationship of peace and fidelity with the Son of God, an eternal covenant that He absolutely will not break.
 - d. That is why the Scripture says in:
 - i. Psalm 34:8 “*O taste and see that the Lord is good . . .*”
 - ii. I Peter 2:3 “*If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*”
5. The disciples were there (at the last supper).
 - a. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus at Gethsemane’s Garden, notice what the disciples did.
 - b. At their last meal together, they had just entered a covenant relationship with Jesus; pledging to protect Him with their last drop of blood.
 - i. Look at Matthew 26:35; Now compare with verse 56.
 - ii. Mark 14:50 “*And they all forsook him, and fled.*”

6. Is it hopeless then? Were Peter and the other disciples forever outside the good graces of this “family” whom they had eaten with and betrayed?
7. Listen folks—once the covenant had been broken, it could only be reinstated, established again by mutual consent in which the person who was violated initiates the supper!
8. Now turn to John 21.
 - a. In verse 9 we see that the fish was already frying when the disciples finally got their catch to the shore.
 - b. Jesus was providing again a meal to reestablish His previous covenant – the relationship that was broken.
9. What is the Lord’s Supper for? One reason is to reestablish the relationship that has been broken between you and God.
10. We ought to be more careful about our relationship with God and our relationship with each other.
 - a. Do not eat together and go home and belittle another church member or the Pastor, etc.
 - b. *“But let a man examine himself and so let him eat . . .”* I Corinthians 11:28
11. Does this principle go farther?
 - a. Certainly; one example that springs to mind is the wedding ceremony.
 - b. After the ceremony is the reception.
 - i. The cake is cut.
 - ii. The bride and groom feed each other the cake. Why is that?
 - (a) I wish more people knew why!
 - (b) They are eating together; they are establishing a covenant.
 - iii. Now look in Malachi 2:14-16.
 - (a) There is a big difference between the two words “covenant” and “contract”.
 - (b) A contract is:
 - (1) Based on distrust.
 - (2) Has limited liability (“prenuptial agreement”, etc.)
 - (3) Can be dissolved by mutual agreement.
 - (c) A covenant is:
 - (1) Based on trust.
 - (2) Has unlimited liability.
 - (3) Cannot be dissolved ever.

CONCLUSION: Tell how to be saved! Christian friend, learn to practice biblical hospitality!