

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 27, 2013

Be Hospitable Toward One Another

by Dan Trygg

“It is necessary, then, for the overseer to be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...” I Timothy 3:2

“For it is necessary for the overseer to be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled...” Titus 1:8

“Let *agapē*-love be unhypocritical; ...contributing to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.” Romans 12:9,13

“Before all things, fervently having *agapē*-love unto yourselves, because *agapē*-love covers a multitude of sins. Being hospitable unto one another without complaint, according as each one received a gift, serving this (gift) as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Peter 4:8-10

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels unawares.” Hebrews 13:2

We have been studying the “one another” responsibilities that we are to be actively exercising toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, in order to help each other and strengthen the Body of Christ. We tend to skim over them as we read the NT text, because most of us have such a radically different church experience than was what early church Christians lived. **In our Western, large church meetings, we rarely interact with each other beyond a surface greeting.** Our involvement with one another is very superficial, in most instances, so **there is little or no opportunity to express the “one another” admonitions to each other. They seem to really have little or no practical application, emphasis or expression in our typical modern church experiences.** *In what way* am I to “love one another” with the near stranger or acquaintance sitting next to me, or in the row in front of me, or behind me? *How will I show them* that I am “devoted in brotherly-love” to them, or how can I “give them preference in honor”? *Where will it come out* that we are “of the same mind with one another”? *How will other church attendees know* that I am “accepting them, as Christ accepted me”? *When will it be appropriate* to “admonish one another”? Would you warmly greet strangers “with a holy kiss”? *How would I show* that I “have the same care and concern for them”? *What opportunity do I have* to “through love, serve one another”, or “bear one another’s burdens”? *When will I “show them kindness”, or need to “have forbearance” for people I don’t even really talk with? In what way will I “be subject to others”, or “consider them as more important than myself”? How often do I “encourage and build up” these other believers sitting in my row, or “pursue the good” toward them? How often do I “confess my faults” to them, or “pray for them”? Then, when I remember that “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun, where the action is supposed to go both ways, I have to ask, “How and when are others ministering to me in the ways listed above?” Go through the paragraph above, and ask, “Who in this church meeting does any of these things to me?”*

This brings us to today’s topic, “Let love be unhypocritical, unphony, ...by ‘being hospitable to one another without grudging.’” Again, in our typical church experience, *how* and *when* am I able to show hospitality to my brothers and sisters in Christ, ...and when am I *being shown* hospitality by them? **The manner in which most American Christians meet tends to allow us to attend with anonymity and obscurity.** We can come and go without hardly anyone else noticing our presence, or penetrating the privacy of our separate lives. **This is not what Jesus had in mind for the church, nor does this at all resemble the church dynamics that the apostles fostered and encouraged.** This is not to say that what we are doing is *wrong*. It isn’t *wrong* or *sinful*. It is just that the way we are typically meeting in most modern churches in Western society is sadly lacking in its ability to foster the interactive dynamic we have been examining throughout our study of the twenty-one “one-another” responsibilities mentioned in the NT. **We miss out on the personal relationships and fellowship God intended for us to have,** and we miss out on the support and encouragement those relationships were intended to bring into our lives. In addition, **we miss out on developing the skills and character that would come through exercising our faith in helping one another.** If I am in my little anonymous “privacy bubble” when I come to church, and leave again, *how* or *when* will others show hospitality to me? *Are they* reaching out to me, ...but I am just turning them down to keep my life “uncomplicated”, ...or is it *true* that no one really extends a welcome to me that goes beyond a surface greeting? When was the last time someone invited you out to lunch, or out for coffee after church? Note that I wrote “*after church*”, ...because there really is little opportunity for the average member to “show hospitality” to another person while they are “*at church*”.

This is so different from the gatherings of Christians in the early days. People came together to a home. Those hosting the meeting were certainly extending *their* hospitality by having people meet in their home. Beyond that, however, **a key part of the meeting was a potluck meal.** Different people contributed food to make this “love feast” an enjoyable experience. **Just that small change in the dynamic opens up all kinds of opportunities to express and**

develop your “show hospitality” muscles. In very practical ways, people could express their “love for strangers” by supplying food or helping to serve one another at the meal time. I can think of many times when we have done this, where we served the mothers with little children, or the disabled and elderly. Getting their plates of food, and seeing that they have everything they need, expresses love, warmth and value to them. **Table fellowship, and serving one another, breaks down barriers of isolation and opens people up to one another.**

In addition to the hospitality dynamic that was present at each meeting, people invited other people over for conversation. My family and I have benefited from that in our experience. There was one family in particular who regularly invited us over for a meal. We talked about spiritual things, and the times were very positive and encouraging to us. They made us feel welcome and important. As a young couple, they helped us through some difficult times by their support and encouragement.

What is “hospitality”? The Greek term used in the passages at the top of this study is a compound word, *philoxenia*, from “*philos*” meaning “friend, one-who-loves/enjoys/delights in”, and “*xenos*”, meaning “stranger, foreigner, outsider, someone-not-part-of-your-family”. Thus, **the word literally means, “friend of outsiders”.** **The word referred to more than attitude or feelings, however. It referred to action.** The Greek verb, *xenizō*, came to refer to *receiving a stranger as a guest*. It implied making them feel welcome by caring for their needs, making their stay pleasant. This has accurately been carried over into our English word, “hospitality”. **To be hospitable means to care for the needs of a guest, to make them feel welcome and comfortable.**

Notice that **hospitality is an important and valued character quality for Christians.** In the first two passages at the top of this study, **hospitality is mentioned as a necessary qualification for those who would be leaders or “overseers” in the church.** Leaders are meant to be emulated. By mentioning this among the highly desirable or necessary qualities for leaders, **Paul set hospitality as a quality all of us should aspire to. It is a mark of Christian maturity.** Note, too, in the Titus passage that Paul first lists the negative, *undesirable* qualities which would disqualify someone from this role of leadership, followed by a listing of those positive qualities which *are* to be desired. **Being hospitable is at the head of the list of positive qualities necessary for leaders.** This makes sense, because these overseers are recognized spokespeople and examples of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus said, “...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-28). **Following Jesus is all about learning to become a servant like He was.** Those who would become leaders in the church should be successful at walking like Jesus walked. **The word for “servant” in Jesus’ statement was diakonos, a “table waiter”, someone who attended to the needs of a guest.** Those who are effective at waiting tables are those who really care about their guests, and are attentive to their needs and desires. **Hospitality should be natural to those who truly care for others, and are attentive to their needs.**

The Romans 12 passage emphasizes that **hospitality is an outgrowth of genuine agapē-love.** *Agapē-love* is the God-prompted motivation to bless and benefit the other person, in accordance with His will for them. **This is such an important, natural outworking of true agapē-love that Paul exhorts us to “pursue hospitality”.** The word for “pursue” is translated as “persecute” in most passages. It means to “seek and chase down”. In other words, **we are to seek and chase down opportunities to show hospitality.** This will *stand out*. This is *different* than what most people do. **This exemplifies the magnanimous grace of God, ...the grace He has extended to us in Jesus, and which also operates inside of those who are filled with His Spirit.** **Hospitality opens the door for relationship with other people, helps them relax and get comfortable, and can create opportunities to share what God is doing in our lives.**

The I Peter 4 passage is the one that admonishes us to show hospitality unto one another. This is our “one another” responsibility for today’s study. The “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun. This means **I am to show hospitality toward you, and you are to show hospitality toward me.** This is part of our responsibility as followers of Christ. As each of us has received special gifts from God, we are to use them to serve the members of the Body. Notice that **Peter was concerned to admonish us to show hospitality without grudging, or without complaint. If we are grudging or complaining, then our heart is not really in it.** We are only going through the motions, ...being hospitable as a duty, not a joy. **If this is what is going on, it is the flesh, not the Spirit.** It will not represent God *well*, ...or shine with the magnanimous grace of God..., because it is *not Him!* **If you find that negative attitude creeping up, it is important to acknowledge it, and refocus to get back into the joy.** If you feel you are being taken advantage of, it may be something that needs to be openly talked about. **We may get caught in unrealistic expectations, or we may have lost sight of the bigger picture** (e.g. Lk. 10:38-42). We may get caught up in *our plan* to serve, and lose sight of *Who* or *why* we serve. **We are to give out of joy, and find joy in the giving.**

Finally, we have the admonition, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers”, reminding us that **we never know who we may end up serving.** Some have even entertained angels without knowing it.