

# Hospitality: The Key to Community

## Various Scriptures

**Big Idea: The best tool you have for building genuine community in the church is your home.**

One of the main ideas that I want us to embrace as we work our way through this series on the Church, is that the Bible depicts the church as a family. We are the *oikos* of God — the “household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). This is a common theme in the N.T. We speak of being “born again” into this family. We refer to God as our heavenly Father, and praise Him for adopting us as sons and making us His heirs (Rom. 8:15-17). We are the family of God.

Furthermore, it’s important that we understand that there are two aspects of this family. There is the extended family of God that consists of all believers everywhere. But then there is also what we might call the nuclear family of God that consists of whatever local church you may be a member of.

Now I have submitted to you that most believers have a low view of the local church. To some, “Church” is just kind of the plural form of the word “Christian.” In other words, the church is simply made up of a loosely connected group of individuals who kind-of believe the same thing. The important thing is not that you are part of a church, but whether you’re a Christian. But the Scriptures don’t make that distinction.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy 3:14-15. Here is one of the two places in the N.T. where the church is referred to as the “household of God.” Follow along as I read. 1 Timothy 3:14–15 Paul writes, “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; <sup>15</sup> but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

My question is this: When Paul speaks of the household of God in this passage, is he speaking of the extended family all over the world or the nuclear family in a local body? Let’s look at the context.

At the beginning of this chapter (chp. 3) Paul lays out the qualifications of elders (overseers) in the local church (1-7). Then in the next set of verses (8-13) he lays out the qualifications of deacons in the local church. In chapter 4 he gives instruction on how Timothy is to teach, in verse 13 he tells Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of the Scriptures. Where is all of this happening? Well, its happening in the local church. In chapter 5, he instructs Timothy about how to reprove and older man or woman in the church. He follows that up with instructions about establishing a list of widows that the church will support financially and who qualifies to be put on that list. After that (5:18) he talks about how to honor an elder and how to protect the elders from false accusations. All of this and more concerns itself exclusively with the local church. So when Paul refers to the “Household of God” (3:15) we need to understand that he is speaking of the local church; that nuclear family of believers who function together as an organized body of believers.

Once again, I want to be unapologetic about the fact that God wants his people to have a high view of the local church. We are a family. We are the household of God purchased by the blood of Christ. The assumption of the N.T. is that when a sinner is born again, he is saved *out of* the world and *into* a local church where the family of God finds it most essential and practical expression.

Now a couple weeks ago we talked about the community of the local church where the central feature is fellowship or *Koinonia*. We learned that fellowship happens when we are actively involved in the lives of the other members of the church to such a degree that all the “one-another” commands of the N.T. are fulfilled. It’s a community where the people love one another, serve one another, confess sins to one another, pray for one another, support one another, build up one another, and do many other things for one another that helps unify the community so that it powerfully shows the world what God is like.

What we need to consider this morning, however, is how does God want us to practice the one-another commands of Scripture? Has God given us any practical tool by which we can obey these commands? The answer is, Yes he has. And that tool for obedience to the one-another commands of Scripture is called Hospitality.

## **I. Hospitality by Definition:**

1. What is hospitality, exactly? That’s a good question. And if we don’t think about it biblically, we’ll get it wrong. Now, I know most of you were born and raised in Texas, and that’s a wonderful thing. Amen? But it might come as a shock to some of you to learn that Texas is actually **not a country** to itself but a single state that has been grouped up with 49 others that make up a bigger country.

2. Now, those of us who accept that (and not all of you do) also know that there is a significant difference in culture between the northern states and the southern states. Having lived in both for a lot of years I can attest to this fact. You may or may not realize that the states in the south are known for one particular characteristic. It’s called “Southern Hospitality.”

3. Southern hospitality means that people in the south are friendly and courteous. Young men are taught to say “Yes sir” and “Yes ma’am.” Strangers actually greet one another by making eye-contact and offering a friendly smile. (Believe me, this is not the norm up north). But this is Southern Hospitality. The old term for it was “civility.” We are civil with one another. We’re polite and respectful. And that’s good. But that’s not the same thing as biblical hospitality.

4. Biblical hospitality is all about demonstrating the deep love of Christ to one another in practical ways. Jesus’ command to His disciples was “*Love one another, even as I have loved you.... By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34,35). What should mark the Christian community more than anything else is our love for one another. And this is how it was in the early church. Alexander Strauch observes that:

“...one of the key factors that helps explain the rapid expansion of early Christianity is the love displayed among the first Christians. This love did not go unnoticed at the time. The third-century African writer and apologist, Tertullian, tells us that the pagans of his day had to acknowledge the extraordinary love of the Christians. The pagans were forced to say, “See...how they love one another...and how ready they are to die for each other.” In an ancient, Latin, Christian dialogue entitled *Octavius*, the pagan Caecilius criticizes the Christians because “hardly have they met when they love each other... Indiscriminately they call each other brother and sister.”<sup>1</sup>

5. This, beloved, is Hospitality by Definition. It’s not just about being nice, and polite, and friendly with one another. It is about opening our lives to one another in sacrificial love, and so demonstrating to the world what Christ is like.

## II. Hospitality in Practice:

1. How did the early believers practice this kind of hospitality? One of the most significant ways was simply by opening their homes to one another. We see this all the way back at the beginning of the church in Jerusalem. Turn with me to Acts 2. You will remember that the day of Pentecost was one wild and wonderful day in history. The H.S. showed up with power. The apostles began speaking in languages they had never learned. Peter preached that great sermon by which 3,000 people came to know Christ. Then there were authenticating signs and wonders performed by the apostles. The atmosphere was electric with excitement over what God was doing in Israel.

2. Then Luke tells us (Acts 2:42-47):

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

3. Notice the phrase “from house to house.” The believers in Jerusalem opened their homes to one another regularly — even daily! This was a practice that marked the life of the early church. Turn to Acts 5:42 “And every day, in the temple and *from house to house*, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.” Turn to Acts 20:20 Paul reminded the elders at Ephesus “how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.

4. We don’t have time to look at all the Scriptures this morning, but the N.T. is full of references to all the kinds of ministry that took place in the homes of God’s people. Ironically, we are told in Acts 8:3 that Saul of Tarsus (who would become the apostle Paul), “*began* ravaging the

church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.” He knew where to find the Christians. He knew they would be meeting in their homes. But this same man after encountering Christ would spend the rest of his life planting churches all over the known world — In Lydia’s house, Philemon’s house, Gaius’ house, Aquila and Pricilla’s house, Nympha’s house, and the house of Archippus.

5. In their homes they loved one another, prayed for one another, served one another, and took the Lord’s supper together. Their homes became a place of worship, encouragement, and accountability. They learned the Scriptures in their homes, enjoyed meals together in their homes. Here they rejoiced and celebrated God’s blessings, and here they wept together over heartache, disappointment, and tragic loss.

6. This is Christian hospitality. It is not exclusively a ministry in the home, but it is a kind of ministry that takes place in homes more than anywhere else in Scripture.

7. If you know anything about church history then you probably know about how Martin Luther ministered from his home. “Luther and his wife, Katie, became legendary for their open home and liberal hospitality. Of their home, one historian writes, “For the great house was always full to the brim.”<sup>2</sup>

8. On a more personal level, many of you know that our own missionaries, Shannon and Danielle Hurley use their home as the primary ministry center of their mission. Those of you who have spent time there know that most of the year there can be twenty people or more living in their house. Now I’m not saying that you have to go that far, but maybe seeing that kind of “extreme” hospitality can help pry open the drawbridge of our homes enough to let people in once in a while.

9. You see, beloved, your home is the best tool you have to enhance loving Christian community in the local church. This is hospitality in practice. But there is something else we need to consider. We’ve discussed Hospitality by definition, hospitality in practice, and now...

### **III. Hospitality as Commandment:**

1. The thing that really struck me this week as I studied this issue was not so much the definition or practice of hospitality. What really struck me is the fact that the NT doesn’t present the idea of hospitality as an option, but as a commandment. That’s right! We are commanded by God to be hospitable.

2. Listen to this sample list of Scriptures:

Practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13)

Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9)

Do not neglect to show hospitality.... (Heb. 13:2)

We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 8)

An overseer, then, must be hospitable.... (1 Tim. 3:2)

Let a widow be put on the list...if she has shown hospitality to strangers (1 Tim. 5:10).

3. Here is kind of a litmus test for true spirituality in the early church. You want to know if someone is really serious about following Christ? Find out if they are committed to hospitality. If she's not, then don't put her on the list of widows whom the church supports. If he's not then don't even *consider* him for eldership. The early church viewed this as Christianity 101. After you embrace the gospel, you commit to attending services, you get baptized, you begin partaking of the Lord's table, and you open your home for ministry to others. This was basic in the N.T. era! It was viewed as part of what makes up essential Christianity. Why? Because it is commanded by God.

4. Why is it commanded by God? Because it is such a powerful way of showing the love of God in a practical, tangible ways. Next to loving God, the greatest commandment is to love one another. Hospitality is simply God's preferred means of getting us there.

5. So then we must ask the question, If hospitality is commanded in the Bible, why do we so often neglect it?

#### **IV. The Neglect of Hospitality:**

1. There may be a number of reasons why believers neglect to open their homes to others. It may be because of ignorance. Some believers in the church just don't realize how important it is to God. But perhaps we just corrected that this morning.

2. On the other hand we need to consider the possibility that sometimes it just comes down to plain old selfishness. Once again Strauch helps us by pointing out that:

Selfishness is the single greatest enemy of hospitality. We do not want to be inconvenienced. We do not want to share our privacy or time with others. We are consumed with our personal comforts. We want to be free to go about our business without interference or concern for other people's needs. We don't want the responsibility and work that hospitality entails. We are greedy and don't want to share our food, home, or money. We are afraid that we will be used or that our property will sustain damage.<sup>3</sup>

3. Now I don't know about you, but that stings my soul just a little. I have to confess that I have had this attitude... and its sinful. It is the antitheses of Christian love. It opposes the example of Jesus' life. And it disregards the promised rewards.

#### **V. The Reward of Hospitality:**

1. The author of Hebrews said (Heb. 13:2) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." Now I don't think this he is saying that we should practice hospitality so that we will have some mystical angelic experience.

Rather, he is simply pointing out that some in the O.T. who practiced hospitality were unexpectedly blessed. Abraham and Sarah, Lot, Gideon, and the parents of Samson all discovered that the people they were being hospitable toward were angelic visitors from heaven.

2. Perhaps the lesson here is that the people who sacrifice for the sake of others are often those who are most blessed. After all, Jesus Himself declared that “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

3. Like all of the commands in the Bible, showing hospitality comes with the promise of blessing. This will be good for us and for our children. We will be blessed more by being hospitable than by keeping our front door closed and bolted.

## **VI. The Need for Hospitality:**

1. I think this message hits on a big need at Calvary Bible Church. God has done so many wonderful things in our midst and he has caused you to be the most loving church I have ever known. Nevertheless, I think we have room to grow here. After studying the topic this week I can't help but conclude that we are weak in the area of hospitality. In large measure we have neglected this command of the Lord and that needs to change.

2. This is such an important issue right now as we think about planting a new church, that I am beginning to wonder if this should not be our focus for the next ministry year. But as the elders are considering that, let me exhort us all to repent of our selfishness and lack of hospitality and begin opening our homes to one another for true fellowship.

3. How do you do that? Here's how. Invite a family or two over to your house. When they come, share a meal or dessert (and coffee, of course). Then, as you are talking and laughing and enjoying one another's company, insert some scripture into the conversation; something you came across in your private time with God, or something from a sermon or Sunday School lesson. Before your guests leave, gather everyone together and sing a hymn or spiritual song. Then pray together about the things you talked about during your time together. That's it. That's true fellowship in the context of hospitality.

4. Perhaps there are some here who feel like you're having a hard time breaking into the fellowship of this church. Try this: before you get discouraged and leave, make it a point to invite to have 10 families over to your home for fellowship. Don't wait around for people to invite you. Step out in faith and say “Lord, this isn't the most comfortable thing I have ever done, but I will do it because it's what You want and I want to please you. Take that challenge and see if the Lord doesn't bless you with some friendships that will tie you tightly to this body of believers.

5. Oh beloved, how kind the Lord has been to make us a part of His church. How blessed we are to belong to this particular household of God called Calvary Bible Church. May the Lord find us faithful in our ministry of hospitality to one another here until He comes.