

June 12, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Show Hospitality to One Another

1 Peter 4:9

This summer we have been looking at the "One Another" commands in the New Testament (there are about 60 of them). So far, we have looked at the commands to encourage one another, to pray for one another, to serve one another, and to love one another.

This morning, we come to the command to "show hospitality to one another." This command only occurs three times in the New Testament. And once, it is combined with the "One Another" term. This instance is found in 1 Peter, chapter 4. And so, turn to 1 Peter, chapter 4 and verse 9.

Now, the fact that there are only three commands in the New Testament to "show hospitality," doesn't dismiss the importance of this command. In 1 Timothy and in Titus (where qualifications for elders are given), hospitality is right there in the list. "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach ..." (1 Timothy 3:1-2). And in Titus, "... 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" (Titus 1:7-8). In other words, if a man is not hospitable, he is not qualified to lead the church in the office of elder. Such is the importance of this command.

Furthermore, hospitality is required of those widows who the church would consider supporting. In the early church, there was no social security. When a husband died, his widow was very vulnerable. And the church would pick up the task of supporting the widows. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:9-10, "Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work."

In other words, you don't support simply any widow. But, one who has clearly demonstrated herself a servant in every way, one of which is "showing hospitality." Such is the Biblical importance of showing hospitality.

Let's look at our first verse this morning (1 Peter 4:9). The verse simply reads, ...

1 Peter 4:9
Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

When we think of hospitality, we often think of having people over for dinner, where you serve your friends some fine food served on your best china. At times, this will include a bit of entertainment, perhaps a sporting event or a game or some other type of activity. Now, that's all part of hospitality. But that's not all of Biblical hospitality.

There are "hospitality" industries, like restaurants and hotels and cruises. And so, some think that hospitality means having people spend the night at your house. Again, that's part of hospitality. But that's not all of Biblical hospitality.

And the best way to understand hospitality is to understand the Greek word that is translated, "show hospitality," or "be hospitable" (NASB, NKJV) or "offer hospitality" (NIV). I don't often discuss the meaning of Greek words, but when I do, it's because it's important. And this word is important.

The Greek word for "hospitality," found here in 1 Peter 4:9 is really made up of two Greek words. The first part means, "love" (brotherly love, like I mentioned last week). The second means, "stranger." Hospitality literally means, "love of strangers."

So, when you have your friends over for dinner with your fine china and entertainment for the evening. It's not really "hospitality" (as the Bible defines it), as you are not really loving "strangers." You are loving your "friends."

Now, it's not that I'm at all discouraging you all from having your friends over for dinner. On the contrary, I'm all over that and would encourage it strongly. It's just that it's not really Biblical hospitality. It's love. It's verse 8.

1 Peter 4:8
Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.'

But it's not verse 9, ...

1 Peter 4:9
Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Now, at this point, you might notice a bit of a problem. These "one another" commands have to do with those in the church whom you know -- your friends. For instance, "Encourage one another" means that you should encourage those in your social circle -- your family and your friends and your church. "Pray for one another" implies that you know those who you are praying for. "Serve one another" and "Love one another" imply a relationship with those whom you are serving and loving.

But then, when we come to this command to "show hospitality," literally, "to love strangers," it seems a bit odd to add to this command the "one another." Do you see what I mean? How can "strangers" also be "one another?"

One of the ways to solve this problem is to realize the audience of Peter's letter. He doesn't write to a specific church, where everyone knows everyone. He writes to a group of churches in a geographic region.

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

And Peter is calling all of these scattered believers to work together as a whole to love one another, even beyond their scope of ability to know everybody. See, when Peter's listeners heard these words, one of the applications that would have come to their minds is the thought of welcoming strangers into their home, to spend the night.

In Peter's day, there weren't many hotels. And many that existed were the hotbeds of sin. And the accommodations often weren't so nice. So, when Christians traveled, they would try to avoid these places and take advantage of the network of Christians across the land. Through mutual acquaintances, they were able to secure lodging with other Christians, even though they were entire strangers.

So, people come to town, find the pastor of the church, talk with him a bit, and he sends them to your home. And the expectation is that you would receive them. And that you would take them in. And yet, Peter exhorts them to do this "without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).

I can see how easy it would be to grumble. Without warning, you hear a knock on your door. As you go to your door to see who it is, they request permission to spend the night. They tell you that they attend the church in Thessalonica and are on their way to visit family in Corinth. "Would you be able to provide a place to stay this evening for me and my family?"

This is tough. And yet, those of Peter's day were called to receive strangers into their homes. To love them. To serve them. To help them on their way.

This is what Gaius was doing in 3 John, which I preached on a few months back. John writes to him.

3 John 1-8

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For 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 testified 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.

From the best we can tell, Gaius was in his home when he hears that knock on the door. And when he opens the door, he finds some missionaries at the door. These would not be Mormon missionaries, but Christian missionaries. John said that these men, "Have gone out for the sake of the name" (verse 7).

Gaius didn't know them personally, for John calls them, "strangers." (verse 5). Yet, these missionaries knew John. And Gaius knew John. So, there was a common link of relationship. And after a bit of discussion of who they were and what they were doing, I think it's clear that John welcomed them into his home. For John writes, "You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God" (verse 6).

We don't know how long they stayed with Gaius. Nor do we know how often they stayed with Gaius. But, I suspect that they had some frequent visits. Because John tells of how these men returned to their home church to testify of John's love and care for them (3 John 6). And now John writes, "You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God" (verse 6).

I would guess that these men were going out on repeat trips, and Gaius was one of their stops along the way. And these men, who once were strangers had now become close friends with Gaius. That's Biblical hospitality.

As Leon Morris said, "Accommodation at inns was expensive, and in any case inns had a bad reputation. But as Christian preachers traveled around, believers gave them lodging and so facilitated their mission. Without hospitality in Christian homes, the spread of the faith would have been much more difficult." [\[1\]](#)

There are other examples of this in the New Testament. When Paul first came to Philippi, he met a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple goods, a worshiper of God (Acts 16:14). "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). She responded to the word and was baptized, along with her whole household (Acts 16:15). Then, she said, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay" (Acts 16:15).

Or, when Paul came to Caesarea, he entered the house of Philip the evangelist and "stayed with him" (Acts 21:8). In Thessalonica, Jason had received Paul and Silas into his home (Acts 17:7).

Now, hospitality isn't easy. Visitors are like fish. They both stink in three days. Biblical hospitality isn't comfortable. But it's the life that God calls us to do.

I think this is why Paul told those in Rome to "seek to show hospitality" (Romans 12:13). Pursue it. Go for it. Keep at it. Don't let down.

When Job was defending his integrity, he said, "The sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler" (Job 31:32). In other words, if there was a stranger in the street, Job loved him enough to invite him into his own home to spend the night. In Matthew Jesus speaks of hospitality, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me," (Matthew 25:35).

This is not our tendency. Our tendency, introvert and extrovert alike, is to live our own lives in our own space. I think that this is especially true of our culture today. We have the opportunity to create our own little space that nobody can come in and penetrate.

We drive up to our homes, we click the garage opener, we drive in, and close the garage door behind us and enter into our own little palace. Never needing to interact with those who live nearby us. We have all the food we need in our refrigerator and pantry. We have the ability to communicate with the outside world through our telephones and computers. We have all the entertainment we could ever want with our cable and internet. We have plumbing in the home. We don't have to hang out our laundry to dry.

Should the need arise that we have need to go out again, we open our garage door, we drive out, clicking the opener as we drive into the street, and on our way, we are in our own little world, filling our cars with the sounds of our favorite radio station. Never even interacting with our neighbor unless they happen to be outside as we drive away, in which case we can wave to them as we pass by.

Not so in the ancient world. In the ancient world, without cars, they lived much more closely together. If they had to go someplace, they would walk. They would walk past each other's homes. They were able to talk with their neighbors as they passed by. Remember, earbuds weren't invented yet, so they could actually hear their neighbors and talk with their neighbors as they were out and about.

And without cable and internet, there wasn't much happening in their homes. All of the action took place outside on the street. And so, they would sit out on the porch and watch the world pass by before them. And in many ways, those of the ancient world were more prepared to show hospitality than we are today. By necessity, there was a greater degree of openness to their lives.

Today, things are a bit different. Travel is easy. Hotels are abundant. Few today have any real, practical need to visit us in our homes. If missionaries come into town, they simply stay at a hotel with no sweat off our backs.

A few weeks ago, Yvonne and I traveled an hour and a half to Palos Heights to the offices of Leadership Resources. We traveled to give a report of our recent trip to India and Nepal, because Leadership Resources is the organization that oversees all of the pastoral training that I do overseas. It was a great time as we shared and prayed for God's work around the world.

While I was there, the discussion turned to an event that we are planning to host at Rock Valley Bible Church for local pastors in October. Several men from Leadership Resources are planning to come out for a few days and lead a group of pastors in the Rockford area in the same sort of training that I have been involved with overseas. Their hope is to rally some other pastors in the area to partner with them as we have done. So other pastors might join the Leadership Resources staff as they train pastors around the world. I have already invited about 20 pastors from the area to come. As the time draws near, I'll be calling some of these guys to encourage them to attend.

Anyway, as we were talking about this event, I was thinking about the length of drive it was to get to Palos Heights, and how these guys were planning to spend a few days here in Rockford. And so, I offered them a place to stay while they were here, so they wouldn't have to make the long commute for those several days. And then, my friend simply said, "That's OK. We'll just grab a hotel for those of us who come."

Such an arrangement is certainly easier for us. But, it's also easier for them, as it gives them a bit of space and time to decompress from the day and work on the next day. It simply costs a few more dollars. But, it's how we live.

It's easier for us to have our separate hotel room than it is to stay with someone else. Furthermore, your opportunities to host fellow believers in your home who have traveled from some other place, who are in need of housing will be few. It's so easy to get a hotel.

In our society, we have the means. We want our privacy. So we get our hotel room.

But, being private people doesn't remove our responsibility to "show hospitality." It simply means that it will look a bit different. So, let's think about this for a bit. What does it mean for us to "show hospitality"? What does it mean for us to "love strangers"?

Perhaps the first and most obvious application of these words have to do with visitors that come to church. They have, if you will, come into our house. And we need to make them feel welcome. Their circumstances will vary greatly. Some are believers, who are visiting from out of town with their family while on vacation. It may be years before they come back again.

Others may have just moved into the area, and are looking for a church. Others may have just had some sort of life crisis, and are looking for answers to life's problems.

Yet, to all of the different circumstances, the call is still the same. We are called to "show hospitality" to them. They are strangers. And we are called to love them.

Visiting a church is a difficult thing. The building is new. The people are new. The way of doing things is new. So, if you see somebody here at church that you don't know, they qualify as a stranger. Love them. Practice the Golden Rule with them. Treat them like you would like to be treated.

If a visitor to church is looking a bit confused, approach them and help them however you can. Perhaps they are looking for the nursery. Show them where the nursery is. Perhaps they want to know what to do with their children. Explain to them how we offer children's church and how children's notes work. Perhaps they are looking for a bulletin (or information). Lead them to the back table and start giving them things. Perhaps they are looking for a bathroom. We have some wonderful bathrooms now! They are up and fully functional! Show them our wonderful bathroom! I'm not quite sure that they will share your enthusiasm.

Perhaps they are just standing there, not quite knowing who to talk to or what to do. Approach them. Talk with them. Introduce yourself to them. Make them feel welcome.

Now, remember, in all of this, we are "loving" them. We are "loving strangers." You don't want to put them on the spot. You don't want to interrogate them. You want to love them.

Now, that will mean asking questions. That will mean inquiring. But, it will mean loving them as well.

One of the greatest things that you can do to help in your own hospitality is to visit other churches. Now, I'm not saying that you should skip out of our Sunday morning to go and visit some other place. I'm thinking of when you are on vacation. What a great opportunity. You are far from home. You can't make it here on Sunday. Find a church and worship the Lord. If you go to the right church, you will be greatly encouraged and edified and you find a body of like-minded believers. Regardless of the church you choose to attend, you will feel that awkward feeling of a new building, a new people, a new way of doing things. And you will know if you were loved or neglected or embarrassed.

Over the years, as we have visited other churches, our experience has spanned the spectrum. We have gone to places where we have been totally ignored. We have come in. We have stood around. We are obviously new. But nobody has the time to greet us.

We have gone to places where we have been totally loved. I'm thinking of a trip a few years ago to Tennessee. We walked in the place and were immediately identified as new people. A few people gathered around us. I remember talking with a guy who had been at the church for years. He told me his testimony and a brief history of the church. I remember a woman who discerned that we had some children. So, she took Yvonne and some of the smaller children off to see what the church has to offer.

The worship service was great, because we had done our homework and had gone to the right church. After the worship service, I remember having a longer discussion with a gal who was in college, who gave her testimony of how the church has made an impact in her life. It was totally appropriate, as we had some college-aged children ourselves. We went away from that church totally encouraged.

And here's my hope. That anyone visiting Rock Valley Bible Church would go home encouraged by the love that they experienced from our church family, as we extend our love to strangers.

The good news is this: I believe that we do a good job of welcoming strangers into our midst. As I follow up with those who have visited our church, people are often blown away by your genuine care and concern for those visiting the church. People who have visited other churches say that our genuine friendliness stands out. I want to commend all of you for that. I want to encourage you to excel still more in these things.

But "loving strangers" doesn't stop here at church. If you meet someone new here, and you discover some common interest, follow up. Call them. Invite them into your life.

We have an opportunity this summer with some of the visiting preachers who will be here in my absence. Consider hosting one of them and their family for lunch after the service. Get to know them. Welcome them. Let me know if you would like to do this now or ever in the future.

"Showing hospitality" doesn't merely stop with people coming to church. There are other ways as well. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? (Luke 10:25-37). The Samaritan attended to the wounded man, and provided food and lodging for him. He was showing love for the stranger.

You can seek to have strangers into your home. Try your neighbors. Make it a goal to have some of your neighbors over for dinner this summer. It's easy. You can even bar-b-que outside!

Let me close with a theological reason why you should show hospitality. Let's look in Ephesians chapter 2.

Ephesians 2:11-13

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands — remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Do you realize that to God, you were strangers before you were saved. It says in verse 12 that you were, "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise." That is, we were separated from the promises of the Messiah. But now, in Christ Jesus, God has brought us near by the blood of Christ (verse 13).

Because we were outside and are now brought in, the command comes to do the same with others. For those who are outside and are strangers, bring them in.

Likewise in Leviticus, we read, ...

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.

I say this: because we were strangers, and God has now brought us near, we should be hospitable people who love the strangers.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 12, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12, p. 146