

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HOSPITABLE:  
PAUL'S COMMANDS IN LIGHT OF HIS MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT

by

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ABSTRACT  
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Many denominations and traditions treat St. Paul’s listing of elder qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2 as authoritative. Yet many writers and commentators give light treatment to the qualification of hospitality. Authors like Gene Getz in *Elders and Leaders* insist that it simply means having people over to one’s house. But St. Paul lived in a culture that had a far richer understanding of hospitality and care for strangers. It is only in light of this cultural context that we can understand what Paul is prescribing for elders. Arterbury’s work about the Mediterranean setting of early Christian hospitality is the most definitive work in this area along with Oden’s sourcebook on ancient Christian hospitality, but the implications for elders are not specifically considered.

Therefore, this thesis will position Paul’s command in its historical setting, looking at the practice of hospitality in the larger Greco-roman society and seeing how it is essential to the role of elder. In addition, these Mediterranean practices will be compared with the practices and teachings about Christian hospitality in the early church to see how closely they match and how early church Fathers interpreted and applied Paul’s command. Finally, this thesis will list some ways that Paul’s command might be interpreted and applied in modern Canadian culture.

## DEDICATION

To my wife Jen, I hardly know what to say. Without your encouragement, your care,  
your support, your love, your care for our children and your help,  
none of this would have been possible.

The way you love God, our friends,  
neighbours and church is  
an inspiration to me.

I love you

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be hospitable? Paul wrote that elders should be so in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2? Does it mean that an elder serves coffee with a smile at a church luncheon? Does it mean that an elder has people from his congregation over for dinner regularly? Does it mean that an elder is courteous and welcoming towards nonbelievers? Does it “conjure up images of ‘tea parties, bland conversation, and a general atmosphere of coziness?’”<sup>1</sup> Or is there something more? What exactly did Paul mean when he sent those words to Timothy and Titus as instructions for their fledgling churches?

Hospitality may very well include the ideas mentioned above: being kind towards outsiders, humble towards those people the elder already knows, generous with possessions and food that an elder possesses. But many scholars neglect the context and culture that Paul was living in when he wrote those words to Timothy and Titus. Many fail to think carefully and deeply about Paul’s Mediterranean background and choose instead to import contemporary definitions of hospitality and use those definitions to clarify the role and qualifications of a modern elder. To understand Paul’s command, one must understand how his world would have thought about hospitality. Then, his culture must be compared to the Scriptural commands and theology that is related to hospitality. Only from the vantage point of careful consideration of Scripture and culture will modern application be possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine D. Pohl *Making room: recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3.

With regards to Paul's Mediterranean context, this thesis will mainly consider three previous major works that carefully spell out what Greeks, Romans and Jews thought about hospitality in the first century AD. Stephen Arterbury's book, *Entertaining Angels* is perhaps the most thorough investigation of ancient hospitality and seeks to "understand the social convention of hospitality as it was understood in the world in which the authors of the New Testament were writing."<sup>2</sup> Arterbury's book provides a comprehensive setting for Paul's instructions about elders by examining and contrasting the Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian approaches to hospitality. Arterbury does an excellent job of summarizing each culture's approach while also providing examples from original literature. Second, Christine Pohl's book *Making Room* also has some good background information about the various cultures while answering questions about modern interpretation and application.

The third major work is a sourcebook edited by Amy Oden entitled *And You Welcomed Me*. This book picks up where Arterbury's book leaves off by examining the earliest writings about hospitality from a Christian perspective. She does excellent work in collecting and interpreting early sources to demonstrate where Christianity hospitality complements and contrasts with the cultures that surrounded it. The original content that she uncovers in everything from John Chrysostom's sermons to Gnostic writings provides a comprehensive picture of the first five centuries following the apostles. Her book is essential for understanding the point that Paul is trying to make in his instructions about elders. These three books, along with numerous journal articles and select chapters from other books provide a firm foundation to understand the roots and the early growth of Christian hospitality and why Paul thought it so essential to the role of an elder in the church.

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<sup>2</sup>A.E. Arterbury *Entertaining Angels : Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 6.

But that is not the end of the investigation of this thesis, for to understand why hospitality is an essential trait for all Christians and especially for elders, the Scriptures must be allowed to speak. Among other important questions, this thesis will inquire: why is the virtue of hospitality so highly regarded that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would include it in a list of essential character traits for the elders of the church? This thesis will undertake a survey of biblical teaching about hospitality with a particular focus on what the New Testament has to say about it. The main thrust of this section will be to explain why hospitality is so essential to the life of a Christians and the role of the elder from a theological and biblical perspective. These findings will be compared with the cultural explanations and motivations for hospitality to see where they overlap or are at odds with each other.

Third, this thesis will take a brief look at some of the early church fathers and writings to see how they were interpreting both the Scriptures and the culture with regards to hospitality. Particularly in the writings and sermons of Gregory of Nazianzen, Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom, we see both the problems that were related to the practice of hospitality and why it was important for elders to be exemplary in their hospitality. These writings also provide a bridge to our modern context allowing modern Christians to make thoughtful application.

Finally, this thesis will summarize and import this ancient understanding of hospitality into a modern setting and make a number of comments and applications regards the selecting, training and work of the elders in the modern church as it relates to hospitality.

It is important to note that this thesis will assume some theological positions on debated issues without much justification. First, this thesis assumes that the list of qualifications given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 are authoritative and binding

for the modern church, including the limitation of the role to qualified men only. This position assumes a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture along with an early dating of Paul's letters among other controversial topics. The purpose of the thesis is not to debate these issues, as it has a different thesis, but rather to stand with scholars like Douglas Moo<sup>3</sup> who have carefully and convincingly argued these points. For that reason, elders may at times be referred to using masculine pronouns in this thesis. Also, if the qualifications for elders given by Paul in the passages cited above are non-binding and non-authoritative, the main application of this thesis is mostly irrelevant and churches may select whomever they wish to be elders, irrespective of their work in hospitality. Therefore, this thesis assumes a conservative understanding of these texts.

But to return to the main point: the ultimate purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate why an understanding of both Mediterranean and biblical hospitality is essential to understand what Paul is trying to say about elders and hospitality and what the modern Christian church is supposed to do with his commands.

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "The interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 2 (1981): 218 and 219.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MEDITERRANEAN HOSPITALITY DURING THE TIME OF PAUL

The Mediterranean culture of Paul's day was not composed of one culture, but of many cultures. The warring and conquering first by the Greeks and second by the Romans had contributed to a mixed culture containing elements from many different parts of the world. Though each successive culture became most prominent, it is clear that older cultures were not completely eliminated but continued to have influence. There were three major influences on the Hellenistic, Mediterranean culture that Paul lived in and that have implications for this thesis's topic: Jewish, Greek and Roman. Each will be explained in turn, and though each has different practices, motivations and challenges, together they make up the milieu that formed Paul's culture. In general, as will be shown, hospitality was a pillar of each of the societies and very important to them both morally and culturally.

#### Jewish Hospitality

The earliest writings about hospitality from an Jewish perspective arise from the Old Testament and in particular the law of God given to the people of Israel as recorded in Exodus 22, Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 16. In these texts there are specific arrangements and protections being offered to strangers, travellers and guests of all kinds. Sociological writers point back to these early laws and stories as a major reason for the development of

hospitality as a virtue in the Jewish context.<sup>1</sup> As the theological background of hospitality will be handled in depth in a later section, the focus here will be aimed more at the sociological (as opposed to purely theological) implications of a few Old Testament stories. There are a number of reasons for the development of hospitality as a virtue from a Jewish point of view. Janzen writes that the rise in importance of hospitality had much to do with the difficulty of travel in ancient times, commenting that travel was “only undertaken for grave reasons, often negative in nature, such as flight from persecution or search for food and survival.”<sup>2</sup> He may have overstepped his point slightly in claiming that these were the ‘only’ reasons, but nevertheless, travel was much less frequent in that era than in Greek or Roman society. In other words, Jewish culture assumed, in general, that any traveler who happened to come into a settlement was in danger or serious need and that a lack of assistance might be the difference between life and death. Hospitality then, was not so much a virtue as a “sociological necessity.”<sup>3</sup> It grew up out a basic desire to preserve life. It was a social guarantee that life would be respected and preserved, no matter the reason and no matter the history between the guest and the host.

Hobbs, agreeing with Janzen, writes that Jewish life was characterized by a “struggle against the elements over which humans had no control, [including] perceived hostile forces.”<sup>4</sup> With life being so difficult, hospitality was not so much a moral virtue as physically essential, especially in the geography of deserts and other arid places. It was not until later in

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<sup>1</sup> Arterbury, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Waldemar Janzen, "Biblical theology of hospitality" *Vision* 3, no. 1 (2002): 4.

<sup>3</sup> T. Raymond Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy'," *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* 95 (2001): 5.

<sup>4</sup> Hobbs, 7.

history that hospitality and generous hosting would come to be associated with virtue, though to be fair, the Old Testament hints at it quite early. In Ex 22:2, God offers justification in some of his commands telling the people of Israel to be kind and generous towards sojourners because “you [plural] were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”<sup>5</sup> But in general, little moral justification was offered in the early development of hospitality. It was simply a way to help everyone survive. So, with the backdrop of hospitality being primarily a means of survival and a necessity of life and secondarily a virtue, the next discussion is of the common practices of Jewish hospitality.

What did it mean for an ancient Jew to be hospitable? A common set of practices emerge from the early sources. The first and most common feature of Jewish hospitality was the kind reception of a stranger or traveller.<sup>6</sup> Hospitality was oriented towards people that a host did not personally know. Hospitality, in that era, was not equivalent to hosting a “next-door neighbour in the fashion of entertaining for dinner.”<sup>7</sup> Nor was it the kind reception of the homeless or other needy people from one’s own community. Rather, from time to time, as people moved for reasons of war, famine, or some other necessity, there would be chances to host them as they traveled to their destination. These strangers were not to be hosted begrudgingly, but gladly, with the knowledge of what was at stake.

Now, this act of hospitality was not purely altruistic, for the kind reception of a stranger accomplished an important purpose for the host as it transformed the traveller from a potential danger into a safe person. After all, an unknown person who comes to an

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references to the Bible will be from the English Standard Version.

<sup>6</sup> Arterbury, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Hobbs, 17.

encampment or town or village is a potential threat. A host would have had little information about who they were or why they had come. But by offering hospitality, which was a known social transaction, the formality of the exchange allowed for a safe process in which host and guest could get to know each other and diffuse any danger. In addition, from the perspective of the guest/traveller, there was also much to fear. The potential host would not usually be a relative from whom a traveller could automatically expect kindness and welcome. But, engagement in hospitality allowed both the host and guest time to get to know each other and set a minimum standard of expectation. It was protection for both parties.

Sometimes, the kind welcome of a stranger laid the foundation for a future relationship.<sup>8</sup> There are examples of chance encounters progressing beyond simple hospitality to a longer lasting friendship, though this will become more common in later periods. The relative scarcity of travel and long-lasting hosting meant that hospitality encounters in the Jewish were generally “for shorter lengths of time,”<sup>9</sup> as travellers only stayed long enough to rest and replenish their supplies and were not as interested in developing strong, ongoing connections with their hosts.

After the kind welcome of a stranger, the second feature of Jewish hospitality was the giving of provisions and protections. Food, water, protection from enemies, fodder for animals and a bed to sleep in were all common features of hospitality. Over and over again the Old Testament describes the preparing and offering of food during episodes of hospitality (Gn 18,19, 24, Ex 2, 1 Kings 17). In terms of quantity, the sheer number of words given to the descriptions of food preparation and shared meals indicate its importance both in the

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<sup>8</sup> Arterbury, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 58.

Scripture text and the relationship of hospitality. The giving of provisions is a distinctive part of hospitality above and beyond a kind welcome because it would be possible to have one without the other. The author of the book of James, in Jas 2:15-16 makes this exact point saying, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" Though the context is not strictly related to hospitality, there may have been temptations for some to welcome a stranger kindly but not provide what they need physically.

The giving of basic provisions was sometimes augmented by the giving of gifts. To differentiate between these two: provisions are necessities for life, while gifts were unnecessary but helpful items. For instance, in the Old Testament, both Moses (Ex 2) and Isaac (Gen 24) are given wives in the course of receiving hospitality.<sup>10</sup> This however is one of the few examples we have of gift giving beyond basic provisions. Gift giving was not very prominent in Jewish hospitality but will become much more pronounced in both Roman and Greek contexts.

The third major practice of Jewish hospitality was that the hospitality relationship was primarily forged between the guest and the head of the household. As the Jewish world was primarily a patriarchal society, this practice followed cultural norms and in most cases the main host would be the father of the household or one of the elders of the town. We do have examples of women offering hospitality in the Old Testament (Jael in Judges 4, Rahab in Joshua 2) but often and normally, it was men like Abraham, Jethro and Lot who were the primary givers of hospitality. It seems, based on the biblical evidence that women offered

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 92.

hospitality only when men were absent. In both stories cited above, there is no mention of a male present when the woman offered hospitality. The expectations seem to have been that the demand for hospitality outweighed the awkwardness or inappropriateness of a female entertaining an unknown male. Or perhaps there was some sort of order or hierarchy commonly understood to decide who forged the relationship with the guest and offered hospitality. Also, it could be that the similarities between heads of households and elders as heads of the church may give a clue as to the reason it was so important for elders to display hospitality, though this will be explored later.

There are many other features and practices of Jewish hospitality from the various stories and teachings that are recorded, but these three remain almost universally constant across many different stories and teachings. In all the major stories we see kind reception of strangers, the giving of provisions and the offer being made by the head of the household. One interesting omission in much Jewish hospitality literature is a lack of explanation of motivation. Greeks and Romans (and early Christians) will be much more concerned with the reasons for offering kindness to strangers, but more ancient authors just acknowledge that it needs to be done and go on describing what actually happens in the exchange.

To demonstrate how Jewish hospitality worked practically from the primary literature, two major examples will be considered. These two stories are cited by many different writers throughout Jewish history as excellent patterns for hospitality. The first story is related to Abraham, and the second story is related to Lot, and both are found in the Old Testament.

First, in Genesis 18, Abraham extends hospitality to three strangers who end up being messengers from God with news regarding the forthcoming birth of Abraham's son Isaac.

The first thing to note in the account of Genesis 18 is that Abraham is described as sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day (Gen 18:1). As a patriarch, Abraham is on the lookout for strangers who might need help and provisions. He is not apathetic about hospitality, but displays eagerness and readiness to meet the needs of the men. He is not on the lookout only during the cool of the evening or morning, but sat through the heat of the day so that he would be ready. Abraham's enthusiasm is displayed further when, he does not wait for the travellers to arrive at his tent, but instead runs to them to encourage them to stop for a rest (18:2). Abraham is clearly eager about the opportunity to care for these strangers. Next he speaks kindly to them, bowing down to the earth and referring to the leader of the group as Lord (Gen 18:2-3). Abraham demonstrates the basic value of showing kindness and attempting to turn a potential threat into a relationship. Next, Abraham offers them simple provisions (water and a morsel of bread) and when they accept, he goes above and beyond his meager offer, and with the help of his wife Sarah, he provides more generous and filling food and drink than he initially promised. He ended up making cakes with fine flour and killing a young calf to make a meal.

Abraham is the consummate host, providing for all the physical needs of his guests before he knows anything about them. It is only after they have eaten, drunk and been refreshed that the strangers share the news of the baby that Sarah and Abraham will soon conceive. This story of Abraham became exemplary for the Jewish people in the development of their ideas about hospitality and its importance in their culture. The Septuagint picks up the story of Abraham and in their revised wording embellishes certain features of the story including: Abraham washing their feet for them instead of the men washing their own; the lavishness of the feast is increased; and the haste with which

Abraham does all the chores of hospitality is increased.<sup>11</sup> Later still in Jewish history, important writers like Philo and Josephus will cite Abraham as the host par excellence in their teachings about the importance of hospitality.<sup>12</sup> Abraham makes the ideal host both for his attitude towards the travellers and his fulfillment of all the important actions of hospitality. He greeted them kindly and eagerly, provided for their physical needs and did all of this as the head of the household.

The second story that comes up frequently in Jewish writings as a model of hospitality is the story of Lot in Genesis 19. In this story, Lot offers hospitality to two angels, even though he thinks of them as just men, and protects them from the anti-hospitality (violence and sexual abuse) of the men of Sodom. The juxtaposition of Lot against the men of Sodom makes it especially useful for teaching, and may be the reason it is cited so frequently by later writers.<sup>13</sup> It follows much of the same pattern as the previous story about Abraham.

The story opens with Lot sitting in the city gate and when he sees the travellers, he gets up, goes to meet them, bows down before them and greets them with the same words of greeting (lord) that Abraham used (Gen 19:1-2). He also offers foot washing, provisions and a place to sleep and in this case, he offers his house in the city. Lot does not explicitly offer protection from enemies to them, but he discourages them multiple times from sleeping in the town square, possibly because he knows the risk that it poses. It could be argued that Lot is implicitly offering protection to the men. After Lot persists in his offer, they accept and go

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Sandmel, "Philo's place in Judaism: a study of conceptions of Abraham in Jewish literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26 (1955): 181.

<sup>12</sup> Arterbury, 61.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

with him to his house. The group eats together and later in the evening, when the men of the town seek to sexually assault the angels/visitors, Lot tries to protect them, even at the cost of his own daughters. It is only when the men of the town are about to break down the door and cause violence that the angels reciprocate the hospitality and miraculously protect Lot and his family. Similarly to the story of Abraham, Lot is rewarded for his hospitality with a command to flee the city before God destroys it.

Both Abraham and Lot are exemplary in their hospitality according to Jewish standards: they are both on the lookout for travelling strangers, they eagerly and kindly give support, they offer and provide food, water, water for washing, food for animals, and protection. Perhaps most significant to future teachers, both men are rewarded by God for their actions and their faith; Abraham with a child and Lot with protection from the destruction of Sodom.

So, to summarize the Jewish view of hospitality is to note that in the beginning, hospitality was more sociologically necessary than strictly virtuous. Jewish hospitality had three major practices: the kind reception of strangers; the offering of food, provisions, protection and sometimes gifts; and the offer of hospitality came from the head of the household, usually a male. Motivations for hospitality were not as important and were not frequently mentioned.

### Greek Hospitality

The practice of hospitality has a long history in Greek culture and has many similar elements to the Jewish practices including: treating strangers kindly by welcoming them, feeding them and protecting them. Also, it was usual for the head of the household to be the

primary host in Greek culture. With the rise of larger towns and cities, it was no longer always a patriarch that hosted but sometimes a king or village chief. Yet the principle of a prominent male hosting still continued. For the sake of space, this thesis will not dwell too long on the features that remain constant between Greek and Jewish hospitality, instead it will examine the differences between the two cultures.

There are three major differences between Greek and Jewish hospitality, the first of which is an increasing variety of guest-host relationships including “relationships between nations, communities and individuals or the combination of any of these categories.”<sup>14</sup> This is in contrast to Jewish hospitality relationships which were practiced almost exclusively between individuals. Arterbury further observes that in Greek culture, even within the category of individual relationships, the Greeks distinguished linguistically and semantically between temporary and more permanent forms of hospitality. There are two ways that hospitality relationships between individuals began to change in Greek culture. First, hospitality was extended with the understanding that “the guest would be willing to reciprocate the host’s generosity if the host ever traveled to the guest’s home region.”<sup>15</sup> So, in contrast to common Jewish ideas where hosts rarely expected to be guests, travel became much more common in the Greek era, possibly due to the ease of movement, the rise of city-states and a more stable and safe society. Hosts were motivated by the realization that they might become guests in the future and would need hospitality in their travels.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Secondly, any traveller “could expect a moral Greek host to provide him or her with at least a one night stay, no questions asked.”<sup>16</sup> As the Greek civilization developed and spread, it was more common to find others with a similar understanding of hospitality. But this offer of simply hospitality did not mean that an ongoing friendship would be established. A guest-friendship, a term used by Arterbury was a more serious relationship that went beyond simple one night hosting. It was the establishment of a relationship that could transcend the lifetime of one person and would be passed along to descendants. A guest-friendship meant a more a serious offer of help and loyalty.<sup>17</sup> This demonstrates a rise in complexity of these hospitality relationships where the Greeks began to distinguish between simple hosting and a more in-depth friendship.

The second major difference in Grecian hospitality as compared to Jewish was the number of motivations offered in the literature. As previously stated, Jewish literature rarely spoke about motivation and if it was covered, necessity and survival were the usual explanations. This is in contrast to the Greeks. Multiple writers detail at least four major motivations for Greeks to offer hospitality. First, Greek mythology assumed that the gods often took human form and hospitality should be offered on the basis that a human might be accidentally hosting a god instead of a mortal. Homer and other writers referred to this as theoxenic hospitality.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin O'Gorman “Modern Hospitality: Lessons from the past,” *The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 12(2005): 143.

Oppositely, there were a number of stories that detailed the punishments that came to those people who refused to offer hospitality to the gods. In this way, the appearance of gods in human form encouraged hospitality from both a positive and negative viewpoint. For example, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Zeus comes down from Olympus to test the morality of humans.<sup>19</sup> Ovid tells how Zeus approaches one thousand homes but no one takes him in until an elderly couple receive him and Atlas into their very modest house. In recognition of their gift, Zeus ends up transforming their modest house into a great temple while flooding out and killing all the people who rejected him. Ovid's story demonstrates both the positive and negative motivations. Experts on Greek culture write that many Greeks were "motivated to treat all strangers with kindness due to the knowledge that any given stranger may turn out to be a god."<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the language of the Greek novelists and poets is strikingly similar to Paul's language in Hebrews 13 where Paul commends hospitality on the basis that a Christian might accidentally be entertaining angels. One can argue that he is appealing more to the story of Abraham in Genesis 18 than Greco-Roman culture, but he was no doubt aware of this Greek tradition and used the cultural form to teach Christian hospitality. Either way, it is clear that the Greeks were nervous of strangers for fear or hope that they might be gods in human form.

A second motivation for hospitality is related to the first. Instead of appearing in human form, sometimes the gods would simply punish people for the lack of hospitality to other humans as divine vengeance for poor moral behaviour. For example, in *The Odyssey*,

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<sup>19</sup> Arterbury, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 24.

Odysseus is constantly searching for hospitality in all of his travels and rarely finds it. Once he returns home, “only those who have offered hospitality are not killed.”<sup>21</sup> In another writing, an author named Pausanias cautions that “the wrath of the God of Strangers is inexorable.”<sup>22</sup> Bolchazy comments that many hosts were motivated to “extend kind hospitality because ... it was in accordance with the desires of the gods.”<sup>23</sup> So then, hospitality was also associated with virtue and morality. The lawmaker Solon, who was born in Athens in 640 BC, placed a lot of importance on being hospitable, and in particular emphasized that people must be hospitable in their homes.<sup>24</sup> This made hospitality virtuous, whether it was offered to humans or gods.

The third motivation was similar to ancient Jewish custom already noted, which was to protect oneself from a stranger. The laws of hospitality turned strangers into friends and Plato notes this motivation in his work *Laws*.<sup>25</sup>

The fourth motivation for hospitality was a desire for personal advantages that might come from hosting a significant guest. As inter-city trade, commerce and travel became more common, new words came into usage to describe the relationships that developed out of these activities. In the early 400's BC, Thucydides coins the term ‘καταγωγεῖον’ which means something like an inn or hostel.<sup>26</sup> The Greeks needed new architectural words to

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<sup>21</sup> O’Gorman, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>23</sup> Arterbury, 27.

<sup>24</sup> O’Gorman, 143.

<sup>25</sup> Arterbury, 24.

<sup>26</sup> O’Gorman, 144.

describe what was going on. For even at that time, hospitality was beginning to accrue commercial advantages and prominent hosts began to sense opportunities. But hosting was not desired for mere financial reasons, for a host could gain prominence socially by giving hospitality to prominent travellers. Arterbury writes that hosts did the work of hospitality so that they could expect similar treatment when they were travellers, or that they could establish more permanent friendships that would be passed on to their heirs, or that their reputations could be bolstered by the lavishness of their hosting.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, the motivations for offering hospitality for the Greeks had clearly moved beyond survival. None of the major writers on Greek hospitality cite necessity as a reason for hosting. Instead, hospitality becomes more deeply integrated with virtue, love for the gods and eventually for personal gain. This sets up a moral tension because hospitality could be used for personal gain or as a show of piety and the proper motivations will become a major issue in Christian writings.

The third major difference between Greek and Jewish hospitality was the gift exchange. It has been noted that the giving of gifts was a minor part of Jewish hospitality, sometimes ignored entirely depending on the situation. In Greek hospitality, the giving of gifts, sometimes very lavish gifts, was a major indicator that that relationship had moved beyond traveller-host to a more permanent friendship. The giving of a gift “inaugurated a permanent, reciprocal relationship,”<sup>28</sup> as Arterbury writes. He points out by way of evidence, the numerous times in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus receives important tokens. Again, there is

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<sup>27</sup> Arterbury, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21.

an intensification of hospitality, a rise in complexity and an elevation of the importance of hospitality among the Greeks.

As mentioned above, one of the other cultural changes that was occurring during the time of the Greeks that affected the giving and receiving of hospitality was the rise of trade and the increasing number of travellers. Plato actually details four different kinds of travellers and the different receptions that ought to be offered them. He distinguished between merchants, cultural visitors, politicians and high status visitors.<sup>29</sup> He also referred to ‘laws’ that all hosts and guests should follow, indicating that there was a general understanding of the practice of hospitality. The rising amount of travel contributed to the evolution of hospitality.

To summarize, there are numerous threads that tie Jewish and Greek hospitality together, namely, the kind reception of strangers, the giving of provisions and protection, and the offer of hospitality from the head of the house or city. But we do see some differences including diversifying motivations, more permanent relationships and the increasing importance of gift-giving.

### Roman Hospitality

Finally, the Jewish and Greek systems and conventions of hospitality will be compared with the Roman system. Even though there will be some differences between the cultures, Arterbury rightly notes that “the custom of private hospitality . . . changed very little from the time period of archaic Greek civilizations to that of the early Roman empire.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> O’Gorman, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Arterbury, 38.

Therefore, the differences noted here are not overly large but will be important as this thesis progresses.

One of the main differences in the Roman system is the slow disintegration of indiscriminate personal hospitality over time. In the Jewish, hospitality was offered universally because survival was at stake. It changed little century to century. All travellers were in need, therefore all received hospitality. In Greece, hospitality was offered more because of the morality and nobility associated with it. But it was still nearly universal, despite the Greek myths. The universal offer began to decay in Roman times as hosts became more and more “selective when they were deciding whether or not to extend hospitality to traveler.”<sup>31</sup> It was no longer an automatic guarantee that one could expect hospitality. So even though Jewish and Greek cultural attitudes about hospitality still had influence, their power was beginning to wane.

Many Roman scholars attribute this decline of universal hospitality to the rise of the patronage system. As Lorencin writes, “the entire Roman system of government was set up as a patronal network, with the emperor at the top of the pyramid.”<sup>32</sup> The patronage system was one where the patron would use his clients for the purposes of increasing his own wealth and prestige. In more plain language, the patron would only accept as a client a person who would benefit him. The client might receive some of normal practices of hospitality from his patron: food, financial aid, protection or political positions. In return for these services, a client was “obligated to enhance the prestige, reputation, and honour of his patron in public

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>32</sup> Igor Lorencin, "Hospitality versus patronage: an investigation of social dynamics in the Third Epistle of John," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 46(2008): 170.

and private life ... support his political campaigns, supply him information, refuse to testify against him in the courts, and give constant public attestation and memorials of his patron's benefactions, generosity and virtue."<sup>33</sup> Essentially, in return for boosting their patron, they received favours, financial aid and political appointments. But this is no longer a virtuous system built on simple kindness, but a system that expects recompense for every act of hospitality. People began to avoid simple hospitality because it held no advantage for them.

Vitruvius writes that the patronage system had developed to the point that even the architecture of houses began to reflect it. For instance, he writes that "those of the highest status, who are involved in politics ... must have high and impressive entrance-halls, wide courtyards and wide porticoes lined with trees to show off visibly how important they are."<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, though patronage was helpful to both the client and the patron and accomplished some of the same goals as hospitality, there are significant differences between a patronal system and basic hospitality. In a hospitality relationship, there is more equality between participants whereas in a patronage relationship there is significant inequality. Hospitality was more equal because there always existed the possibility that roles would be reversed at some point. But it was more rare for a patron to become a client. Leapfrogging up the ladder of power and social accomplishment in Rome was much more difficult unless a more powerful person than your current patron took interest in you. This made patronage relationships fundamentally and permanently unequal. For instance, clients would often show up at "the house of their patron at dawn in order to be ready to greet him when he appeared

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<sup>33</sup> John H. Elliott, "Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society: A Short Reading Guide," *Forum* 3(1987), 43.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce A. Winter, *After Paul left Corinth: the influence of secular ethics and social change*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 187.

for the morning *salutatio*.<sup>35</sup> This is far different from a kind welcome offered to a traveller in need.

Another difference between patronage and hospitality was the length of the relationships. In general, hospitality was more of a temporary relationship whereas patronage was more permanent and definite. This also affected the nature of the relationship. To be permanently indebted to a patron was much more significant than accepting provisions to last a few days until the next destination. The importance of the patronage system in Roman culture led to outright discrimination in deciding which kind of people a patron was likely to show hospitality towards. Cicero, sadly commending this discrimination, wrote that “the houses of illustrious men should be open to illustrious guests.”<sup>36</sup> Relationships and kindness were not to be handed out randomly to whomever should happen to come by, but rather were calculated for maximum personal benefit. In the words of an early Christian apologist writing against the patronage system, Roman hospitality was “ambitious.”<sup>37</sup> The rise of this patronage system led, as least in part, to the decline of universal and unquestioning hospitality. Strangers were no longer kindly received with no questions asked and provisions were no longer handed out indiscriminately, but relationships became more and more calculated. Hospitality did not disappear, but it was being slowly squeezed out.

A second change that began to occur in Roman times, related to the patronage system, was the increase in wealth. As Rome began to form as an empire and extend its reach, some of its leaders and prominent citizens became fabulously wealthy. This, as was mentioned, led

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<sup>35</sup> Winter, 188.

<sup>36</sup> Pohl, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

to a rise in patronage as patrons had extra money to dole out to supporters. But more than that, it led to reflections on the differences that increasing wealth makes in a person's life, especially as it relates to hospitality.

Dio Chrysostom, a Roman poet, wrote in the late part of the first century AD a work called *Seventh Discourse* where he tells the story of hospitality he had received following a shipwreck. The family who received him and cared for him was very poor, but yet were extremely generous with what they had. He concludes that "one does not have to be wealthy to extend ideal hospitality to strangers. Instead, the poor often turn out to be better hosts."<sup>38</sup> This would have been a shock to Dio, for the ones who commonly offered hospitality (or patronage) in Roman culture were the richest. Yet he discovered that wealth, though it offers more opportunity to share, tends to make people stingy and tight-fisted with their money. The increasingly rich Roman society, instead of using their large houses and extensive possessions for hospitality, were trending in the opposite direction.

One example from Roman literature commonly cited as an example of hospitality is a scene from the novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*<sup>39</sup>. In this novel, a character named Theron has kidnapped Callirhoe to sell as a slave. As Theron flees with Callirhoe, he runs into a character named Leonas. Leonas firmly believes that the gods have sent Theron to him and Leonas immediately invites Theron into his house to be a friend and guest and serves Theron food and drink. Later when Theron brings Callirhoe into the house (she was not there the first time), Leonas serves both of them. This scene displays a few of the elements present in each of the cultures: reception of a stranger, religious belief that the gods have sent a person and

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<sup>38</sup> Arterbury, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 42.

look kindly on hospitality, the offering of food, drink and lodging. Similar elements are seen in other Roman texts including *the Odyssey*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, and *An Ephesian Tale*.<sup>40</sup>

The Roman writers spoke less about motivations than the Greeks and even the Jewish civilizations. Some of the Greek myths were replicated in Roman mythology as there are examples of gods taking human form to interact with humans. But compared to the Greeks, who wrote extensively about motivations and morals, the Romans have relatively little. The display of virtue increasingly took a backseat to social advancement. Again, the differences between the Romans and Greeks are slight and have been magnified here for examination.

### Summary

In observing the whole of the three cultures approach to hospitality, there is both continuity and evolution. Continuity is seen in the elements of hospitality that continue through hundreds and even thousands of years: kind reception of strangers, provision of basic necessities, hospitality offered by the heads of the household or heads of cities. In addition there are many minor additions: gift giving, establishment of friendships, reciprocation agreements. But there is also evolution as society and culture developed and challenges arose to hospitality. Hospitality emerged in a world that needed it for survival but struggled as it came up against tough social and economic forces. It was encoded into myths, legends, moral teachings and civil law but also existed as a moral virtue outside of all these codes. This is the world that the Apostle Paul was born into. A world full of conflicting ideas about hospitality, a world full of cities, towns and deserts.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 43.

Christians in this world would have been confused - how did their new beliefs fit with the cultural landscape? Was hospitality more or less important now that they were Christians? Were their motivations supposed to be different? Should Christians participate in the patronage system - and if so, to what degree? What sorts of practices of hospitality were still relevant? With all of these questions, it is not enough for biblical scholars to say, "Paul told elders to be hospitable, so go do it!" Hopefully by now it is obvious that the question of what it means to be hospitable as a Christian, and as a Christian elder, is not so easily answered. For Jewish Christians, hospitality meant one thing and to Greek Christians it may have meant another and to Roman Christians, something else entirely. Or, a person might have been a mix of the three cultures. Therefore, the Scriptures themselves must be mined for clues about the practice of hospitality, the recipients of hospitality and the motivations for hospitality to see where Paul might have agreed or disagreed with his culture. The Bible must be held alongside the cultural analysis to see what overlaps and what is acceptable for Christians.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is frequently mentioned by the writers of the NT and as might be expected, often functions as a continuation of Mediterranean hospitality. After all the Christian church was composed of people who had grown up in the Mediterranean culture. Descriptions of Christian hospitality contain elements of Jewish hospitality along with elements of Greek and Roman hospitality. Paul and the other NT authors draw from different traditions as the situation dictates. Also, mentions of hospitality are widespread in the Scriptures and even when hospitality is not being directly taught, there are references and allusions to it. For instance, though there is little explicit teaching on hospitality in the book of Acts, Berryhill cites thirty seven different hospitality related activities ranging from receiving guests, escorting people on their way, sending out guests, feeding guests, taking care of guests and more.<sup>1</sup> It is the intent of this thesis not to fully document all that the Scriptures have to say regarding hospitality but rather to sift through the New Testament to find clues as to where Christian hospitality both continues or diverges from its cultural context. This involves looking for allusions to and direct teaching about the practices of hospitality, the recipients of hospitality and the motivations for hospitality. These three parts (practices, recipients and motivations) form the outline for the second section of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Carisse M. Berryhill, "From dreaded guest to welcoming host: hospitality and Paul in Acts." In *Restoring the first-century church in the twenty-first century: essays on the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement in honor of Don Haymes*, (Eugene, Ore: Wipf and Stock Publishers, (2005): 86.

### Practices of Hospitality in the New Testament

First, what sort of hospitality practices can be observed in the New Testament?

The short answer is that many different kinds of practices are observed. Hospitality in antiquity always begins with the obvious: a kind invitation and its subsequent reception. There are numerous examples of this in the Scriptures. For instance, in Lk 7:36, a Pharisee initiates a meal and invites Jesus, who gladly accepts. This scene is repeated with an invitation extended by friends of Jesus, as in Lk 10:39 where Jesus accepts an invitation from Martha and is welcomed into her house. Notice that the giving of invitations are not limited by gender, but Jesus recognizes and accepts an invitation from both a man and a woman. The Apostle Peter acts in a similar way, both offering hospitality and accepting hospitality from Gentiles in Acts 10. Paul accepts hospitality from Lydia and the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, being welcomed into their respective houses and eating with them. Hospitality is not limited by race or culture, as both Peter and Paul accept invitations from Gentiles.

Not only are invitations accepted, but the NT also records guests requesting hospitality. Jesus requests that Zaccheus host him for a meal in Lk 19:5, and Paul seemingly drops in on a number of different people in his travels to Jerusalem in Acts 21:1-10. Paul also references a trip he hopes to take in the future in Romans 15, presuming that the saints in Rome will be able to offer him hospitality. Now, one might object that these are not examples of hospitality, because in most cases the guest is known to the host. After all, Jesus was known to the Pharisees and Peter and Paul were known at least by name and reputation, if not personally, to the saints with whom they stayed. This is important because this thesis has previously established that hospitality had its origins as a kind welcome offered primarily

to strangers. So, how does one make sense of this apparent contradiction? The main clue that these are in fact instances of hospitality lies in the original Greek of the texts cited. In many of the examples above, the authors continue to use the same terminology that was used by the Greeks to describe hospitality.<sup>1</sup> For instance when Peter is staying at Simon the Tanner's house in Acts 10, the word used is ξενίζω, often translated "lodging." Because lodging sounds different from hospitality, it is tempting to omit this sort of activity from the category of hospitality and call it something different. But, words with the ξεν-stem were widely used in Greek to refer to the custom or offer of hospitality. In other words, the NT authors are picking up the same Greek words but using them in slightly different ways, so that hospitality is not always between absolute strangers, but can also refer to people who do not live in the same place but are travelling. So, the textual evidence demonstrates that Paul, Luke and the other writers are expanding the definition of hospitality to include examples cited above like Jesus eating a meal with a Pharisee, Paul eating with Lydia and the Philippian jailer, and so on. The language itself allows such a connection to be established.

But there is more, because in addition to the ξεν-stem, the NT also uses a few turns of phrase that reference hospitality like, ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ('I come to you') found in the letters to the Corinthians at least four times. According to linguists, this phrase is associated with "either a former guests anticipation of a hospitable reception from an established host . . . or with the arrival of a traveler who is seeking hospitality."<sup>2</sup> Paul, as the writer of the letter to the Corinthians is using Greek euphemisms and expanding it to include his activities. So, it is possible to conclude from the evidence that New Testament writers are

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<sup>1</sup> A.E. Arterbury *Entertaining Angels : Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

extending the notion of hospitality beyond hosting random strangers to include taking care of travelling missionaries and apostles who may come to stay for repeated visits. The same language is also used in reference to the poor and needy, though not in so many places. Christian hospitality is not just the kind reception of a stranger but also the kind reception and repeated reception of authorized members of God's kingdom. This understanding opens a door to see how the practices of Christian hospitality began to be established.

This pattern of labelling the hosting of missionaries and pastors as part of Christian hospitality is widespread and is referenced in a number of areas in the New Testament. It seems that just as Jesus instructed his disciples to go out on missionary journeys carrying very little in the way of supplies and provisions, and depending on the generosity of strangers (Matthew 10, Mark 6, Luke 9 & 10), so the early Christian missionaries functioned in a similar way.<sup>3</sup> There is strong biblical evidence (along with scholarly support) that this minimalist approach to missions became the dominant paradigm in the early years of the church and some go so far as to argue that "travelling missionaries become the most prominent recipients of early Christian hospitality."<sup>4</sup> This is debatable, for it is possible that writers wrote about this part of hospitality because it was so new and unique as opposed to the normal, everyday hosting of strangers. An argument based on quantity of literature is not overwhelming. But the evidence does suggest that hosting missionaries became very prominent and it is verifiable that hospitality has expanded beyond its original activities. Paul for instance, assumes that travelling missionaries have the right to expect support and hosting from those that they minister to in 1 Corinthians 9, even though

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

he refuses such support. To paint a picture of the context, there appears to have been a number of travelling missionaries/pastors/evangelists/teachers who moved around the Mediterranean working out their calling while depending on Christian hospitality from local churches and people. They depended on the continuation of the cultural practice of receiving travellers and strangers kindly and providing for their needs. This growing practice though, led to two specific problems which are also written about in the New Testament, helping to throw further light on the complexity of 1st century hospitality.

The first problem caused by generous hospitality was “the potential for local congregations to become overloaded with the financial burden”<sup>5</sup> of caring for the missionaries. This problem is alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 but is spoken of with much more regularity by early Christian writers<sup>6</sup> and will be examined more thoroughly in the third section of this thesis. At this point, it is enough to know that early Christian writers in the post-apostolic period began to limit the amount of time a travelling missionary could stay because of the abuse of hospitality.

The second problem with Christians hosting missionaries is that some of these early travellers who received hospitality spread heresy along with truth. In the first few years, there was no system for vetting these travellers and no easy way to contact the apostles to find out if the missionary on the doorstep was legitimate. The answer to this problem was usually letters of recommendation. A travelling missionary who showed up to a church meeting or a new city would present letters from recognized authorities like Peter, Paul, James or another apostle to commend them. Scripturally speaking, there is at least two places

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 122.

that evidence of this practice shows up. First, in 3 Jn 9, there is a reference to a travelling missionary named Diotrephes who has caused some problems in the church. John warns against listening to men like him. Also, in 2 Cor 3:1, Paul claims not to need any special commendation or a letter of recommendation because the previous work he has done in Corinth speaks for itself. As can be seen from these passages, even in the early days of the church, it was common for the church to be cautious on indiscriminate hospitality to missionaries. Further, there is evidence that even in Paul's day, missionaries began to carry letters of recommendation with them to ensure a hospitable reception.

To summarize, there is plenty of biblical evidence for a kind welcome towards strangers, travellers and missionaries. This follows in line with the cultural expectations arising out of the Mediterranean context, but it also broadens it, allowing for repeat visits by known missionaries.

The second practice common to hospitality is the provision of food, water, shelter, protection from enemies and other basic necessities. The Scriptures are filled with examples of this. Jesus, in Lk 7:36 and Lk 10:40, sits down to eat food with his hosts. In Paul's interaction with the Philippian jailer, the text specifically mentions the food that was set before Paul and that he ate with them. Later, when Paul writes to Philemon he specifically requests ἑτοίμαζέ, which is defined as "a hospitable reception with all the amenities that good hospitality entails"<sup>7</sup> clearly indicating his desire not simply for a welcome but also the provisions that go along with it. Oppositely, Paul laments the frequent absence of hospitality (or blatant inhospitality) that he has experienced as part of the hardships of his ministry in 1

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<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians; Philemon* (ANTC; Nashville; TN: Abingdon Press, 2000): 142.

Cor 4:11-13 and 2 Cor 6:4-10. The way his list is constructed, it is clear that the lack of physical rest, food and protection that comes with good hospitality is a hardship to him.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Paul breaks bread on numerous occasions with hosts in Acts, and many of the meals use words related semantically to hospitality.<sup>9</sup> Based on this evidence, it is clear that the Christian hospitality falls in line with the cultural expectations of providing physical necessities to the guest. Hospitality has not become overly spiritualized, but remains very physical and tangible.

Finally, the other major practice hospitality seen in Mediterranean culture is the offering of hospitality by patriarchs, leaders of households and other civic leaders. As the first section described, the Jewish context usually relied upon the head of the household to make the offer of hospitality and the Greco-Roman culture frequently relied upon leaders of towns and city states to provide hospitality. Christian hospitality will reflect this context, but grow beyond it. In some cases, the Scriptures show heads of household offering hospitality, but other times it will instruct spiritual leaders to take a leading role in hospitality. Cultural practice is innovated upon when elders are commanded (twice) to show hospitality as part of their character and calling (1 Tim 3, Titus 1:8). If, as Mittelstadt writes, “God’s household provides a metaphor for the church ... the overseer must exhibit the best qualities of familial and institutional hospitality.”<sup>10</sup> So in one way of thinking, the calling of elders to be hospitable makes sense in light of being heads of God’s household. But, this is also a

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<sup>8</sup> Martin W. Mittelstadt, "Eat, drink, and be merry: a theology of hospitality in Luke-Acts," *Word & World* 34(2014): 133.

<sup>9</sup> Berryhill, 86.

<sup>10</sup> Mittelstadt, 134.

departure from the culture, because priests, prophets and spiritual leaders have never been relied upon to be hospitable. This calling is unique to Christianity.

There are some other interesting wrinkles in whom the Scripture records as showing hospitality. On some occasions, the women of the church are shown taking the initiative to offer hospitality. For instance, Lydia insists in Acts 16 that Paul stay at her house and receive hospitality from her and her household. Paul accepts, demonstrating approval of her offer. Later, in 1 Tim 5:10, Paul commands a good record of showing hospitality as a character test for older widows, indicating the participation of women in the work of hospitality. Women it seems, as in ancient Judaism, sometimes play prominent roles in hospitality. This may be because they were the heads of their households, but Acts is showing the gospel message moving beyond geographic, racial, cultural and gender bounds to include all people, and it may be that relating these stories is part of Luke's point about the equality of all people in the gospel.

To summarize the practices of hospitality observed in the New Testament is to say that they would have been recognizable to others living in Mediterranean culture. The nuances and innovations to hospitality were not overly significant, outside of the prominence given to travelling missionaries and the role of the elders in providing hospitality. Generally speaking, the practices of early Christians had their roots in the various cultural expressions of hospitality.

### Recipients of Hospitality in the New Testament

From the question of “what does hospitality entail?” this thesis shifts to the question of “who do the Scriptures teach as worthy of hospitality?” This has already been

covered in part when the last section addressed the growing concerns of the church with showing appropriate hospitality to travelling missionaries. But who else do NT writers command their readers to show hospitality towards? What other categories of people are listed?

One category commonly listed by both Jesus and other writers is the poor. In Luke 14, in a short speech that precedes the parable of the great banquet, Jesus instructs those listening to invite the poor when they host a banquet, instead of just the rich. The kind of language he uses has connotations of hospitality.<sup>11</sup> Likewise in James 2, in the context of a gathered church, James warns them not to show preference to rich people while ignoring those who are poor. It is to be acknowledged that it is difficult to parse out commands to be generous to the poor vs. commands to hospitality. Scripture, after all, is not concerned with which command fits in which category, but on at least the occasions mentioned above, it connects hospitality with the poor.

A second category sometimes mentioned is strangers. Jesus commends hospitality-related activities of feeding, clothing, and welcoming, and specifically mentions strangers in Matthew 25. The writer of Hebrews commands showing hospitality to strangers in 13:2, adding an additional motive that one might be entertaining angels accidentally. This upholds the cultural tradition of welcoming any and all who might need help. Though it is an argument from silence, it is likely that there were few objections to hospitality offered to strangers and the NT writers did not feel a pressing need to address them specifically. They were more concerned with newer categories of hospitality, namely other Christians and travelling missionaries.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 138.

A third category that Christians were commanded to show hospitality towards is other Christians. Peter specifically commands Christians to show simple hospitality to one another, as needed. 1 Pt 4:9 instructs Christians to “show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Likewise, in a long list of instructions in Rom 12:13, Paul tells them to “contribute to the needs of the saints and show hospitality.” Again, this is an expansion beyond cultural norms, for this is the first time hospitality is shown distinctly along religious lines. Paul will specifically seek out Christians in all the towns that he visits for hospitality, instead of finding a random person to take him in.

In summary, Christian hospitality is expanded beyond Jewish conceptions of hospitality which was limited to the needs of travellers and those in desperate need because of famine, loss, and enemies. It is also expanded beyond a Roman conception of hosting those who might be helpful to one’s social standing. Instead, hospitality is offered widely and freely while also being directed specifically to those people who are Christians. The underlying factor that decides who should receive hospitality is not social standing, wealth, gender, ability to reciprocate or any other common cultural measure of a person’s importance. Instead, the simple criteria seems to be need and there are new categories of need with the rise of Christian missionaries. The gospel will undermine all distinctions commonly made between people and invite all people into hospitality. But this leads into the area of Christian motivation for hospitality.

### Motivations for Hospitality in the New Testament

This thesis has discussed what it means for Christians to practice hospitality and who they ought to be hospitable towards, but why should they show hospitality? Should they emulate the culture and show hospitality out of patronage, necessity, nobility or fear? Or is

there a distinctly Christian motivation? This section on motivation will describe two basic motivations for Christian hospitality, but will focus primarily on the second as distinct to Christianity. There are only two basic motivations for hospitality offered by different New Testament writers: theoxenic (hospitality exercised towards gods/deities), and altruistic (hospitality motivated by love). These motivations are taught in contrast to the main Jewish motivation, namely survival, the main Greek motivation of noble virtue or the basic Roman motivation of social advancement. Each Christian motivation will be demonstrated and described through the teaching of the NT.

First, regarding theoxenic hospitality, Paul picks up on threads present in Greco-Roman culture. As previously discussed, there is a wide variety of materials that show the gods taking human form and seeking hospitality from humans in Greek and Roman literature. The teachers and philosophers told and retold these stories to motivate people to be hospitable. Paul, somewhat unexpectedly, does something similar. In Galatians 4, Paul is referencing his first visit to the Galatians and says in vs. 14, “you did not scorn or despise me but received me as an angel of God, as Jesus Christ.” Now, admittedly, Paul does not say that they thought of him as an angel, or were wondering if he was a god, but the language he is using suggests the Greco-Roman tradition of theoxenia.<sup>12</sup> Paul is alluding to a cultural custom that has been picked up by Christians and one that he is not necessarily opposed to. A second and more direct example comes in Hebrews 13:2 which says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Most commentators think the author is referring back to the stories of Abraham and Lot in Genesis,

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<sup>12</sup> Arterbury, 95.

but even if he or she is, it is still a direct appeal to consider, when offering hospitality, whether or not supernatural beings have taken human form.

Despite these two references, the theological thrust and weight of the New Testament leans away from theoxenic hospitality, primarily because of the theology of the incarnation, resurrection and ascension. For the NT writers, the one, true God has definitively and obviously appeared in human form to be hosted, given provisions and treated kindly. This God, Jesus Christ, died, was buried, was resurrected and has ascended bodily into heaven, not to return until the end of the age. This belief in the incarnation of God fundamentally rules out the “gods” descending in human form to seek hospitality as a stranger. Therefore, a theoxenic motivation for hospitality does not make a lot of sense in the post-resurrection world. However, it is important to note that the command in Heb 13:2 refers to angels, not gods. Perhaps, the writer of Hebrews and Paul in Galatians thought hospitality could be valuable because the stranger might be an angel. This explanation cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, NT writers will spend a significant amount of time on the other motivation for hospitality, namely love.

To be clear, the altruistic motivation did not originate entirely in Christianity. The Greeks spoke of altruism and virtue as a reason to extend hospitality, but the NT writers take it to a whole new level. Their primary argument will revolve around understanding God’s love for Christians and then allowing that love to work in them, producing a motivation for hospitality. So, the first part of the argument hinges upon a correct understanding of what God has done for humans.

In the Scriptures, one could argue that the whole of the Bible presents the relationship between God and his people as a guest-host relationship. To understand what

God has done for humans means understanding what he has been doing since the very beginning of the world. In Genesis 1 and 2, all of creation is called into being by God and then offered to humans who are God's guests in his world. The world itself and all that fills it are gifts from God to his hosted people. Genesis records God himself offering a kind welcome and essential provisions for his guests. Later in Lev 25:23, God reminds the people of Israel that the land does not really belong to them but rather to him, and he lends it out to people. God is the host par excellence and all people are his guests. But God's hosting, and therefore his love, is not limited to raw nature and basic provisions and the NT will go far beyond those ideas.

Many of the images of God's kingdom in the New Testament are associated with food, drink, protection and home, all things associated with hospitality. In his parables, Jesus repeatedly presents the kingdom of God as a feast or a banquet. Matt 22:1 says the kingdom of God "is like a king who gave a wedding feast for his son." Lk 14:16 compares the kingdom to "a man who gave a great feast and invited many." The food at the feast is not discovered or cultivated by humans, instead God is the great host who has gathered and prepared it for his people who come and sit at his table to eat. But this idea is not only found in the parables for Jesus repeatedly acts as a host who feeds his guests at a table in real life. For instance, in the feeding of the 5000 (Matt 14), at the Last Supper (Jn 13), at the dinner on the Emmaus Road (Lk 24) Jesus is at the head of the table, handing out the food, making sure everyone has enough to eat. He reveals himself as the great host and becomes known to his people in the breaking of the bread. More than that, the Scriptures also look forward to his role of host at the final Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19). Jesus was a great host on earth, but it was just a foretaste of how he will host his people at the end of time.

Paul and other NT writers take this to mean that fundamentally Christians are to see themselves as guests and strangers, hosted by God. Or to be more blunt, Christians understand themselves as travellers in desperate need, receiving everything on earth as a free gift. The Apostle Peter picks this theme up in both his introduction in 1 Pet 1:1 and in 1 Pet 2:11 where he refers to Christians as sojourners and exiles in this world. Heb 11:13-14 follows a similar tack, calling the OT patriarchs “strangers and exiles on the earth.” Also, just as many OT laws reminded the Israelites that they were once strangers in Egypt, so one of the fundamental marks of a Christian is the understanding that they too are strangers, and if strangers, then guests being hosted.

This self-understanding will prove foundational when it comes to hospitality because it undermines both the Roman tendency towards patronage and the Greek tendency towards pride in oneself. For, if all things are a gift from a hosting God, then the Christian is not free to use their possessions, house, or reputation or anything else they might possess for self-promotion, as a way to put others in their debt, or to hoard. Instead, all things must be given away as freely as they have been given. If one does give away much personal wealth in hospitality, it is no reason to boast, for the Christian is only a steward of someone else’s wealth (i.e. God). The Christian understands how greatly they have been loved and how well they have been hosted and he or she responds in grateful obedience.

Now, even if this is true in general, is it true specifically about hospitality? Are the commands to hospitality directly linked with the love of God and the hosting of God? As will be demonstrated, hospitality is indeed linked with the love of God. In Romans 12, Paul begins a section on practical theology and Christian living with the word “therefore,” appealing to Romans 1-11 as justification for the ensuing commands about how Christians

ought to live. The whole of his letter leading up to Romans 12 is the backdrop for his instructions. So when Paul commands in Romans 12:13 that Christians should seek to show hospitality, that command must be read in light of a response to all that God has done in the life of a Christian - calling, regenerating, justifying, sanctifying, and filling with his Spirit. Paul is saying in short; seeing as God has done all of this (Romans 1-11), now go and seek to show hospitality. Even the word choice in Romans 12:13b is φιλοξενίαν, or hospitality motivated by love.<sup>13</sup> One commentator writes that Paul may be “specifically asking the Roman Christians to provide loving or altruistic hospitality as opposed to contractual hospitality.”<sup>14</sup> Paul links hospitality to love both contextually and linguistically.

In addition, when commending the practice of hospitality to the Jewish Christians undergoing many trials in 1 Peter 4, Peter bases his argument in the sufferings of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Chapter 4 begins with the injunction “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,” and then lists a long set of practical commands including the command to show hospitality. Since Christ has done all this for you, Peter argues, now go and love like he has loved. Likewise, Acts shows (rather than explicitly teaches) how acts of hospitality are a demonstration of the gospel message. Eating together in homes is one of the earliest marks of the church (Acts 2) and expressions of hospitality are pivotal in evangelism to previously marginalized people groups like eunuchs (Acts 8), Samaritans (Acts 8) and Gentiles (Acts 10). In those passages, we see Christians eating with outsiders, going to their homes, and allowing themselves to be hosted by them. Later in Galatians 2, Paul will rebuke Peter for changing his practice of hospitality and no longer sitting to eat with the Gentile believers.

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<sup>13</sup> Arterbury, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

This is the Christian motivation for hospitality: Show hospitality because it might be an angel, but practice hospitality because of the way God has acted towards you. Dwell on his generous hosting, his great love towards you in creation and in Jesus Christ and let that move your heart towards being hospitable towards others.

### Elders and Hospitality in the New Testament

So far, the examination of the NT's teaching on hospitality has been through the lens of the ordinary Christian life. But the command is directly mentioned five times in the New Testament and two of those times it is directly addressed to the elders of the church. So, consider the question that is extremely relevant to our thesis; what is it about the role of elder that makes hospitality so important? What can be seen in the practices, recipients and motivations of hospitality that would make it so essential for elders? There are at least three different reasons that it is essential for elders to be hospitable: for the protection of the church from false teachers, because elders have understood the gospel in a significant way, and because of the continuation of cultural traditions. Each of these reasons will be explained in turn.

First and foremost in the minds of NT writers is how to protect the church from false teachers. Nearly every letter lists false teachers as a major worry or as a major reason the letter was written in the first place. Consider 1 Tim 1:3b where Paul writes to Timothy, "remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." 2 Jn 10 warns Christians not to take into their homes or give any greeting to false teachers, a direct reference to false teaching and its relationship to hospitality. In the closing of his letter to the Romans, Paul warns them to watch out for those, who by their smooth talk and flattery, cause divisions and create obstacles in the church (Rom 16:18). The first letter

to the Thessalonians in 5:18 encourages Christians to test everything and hold fast to the good. With all this worry about false teachers, it makes sense that the churches needed to develop ways of testing the theology and teaching of the visitors who came to them.

Mittelstadt comments that it would have made sense for “the home of the overseer [to serve] as a place of screening to avert threats to church life and order.”<sup>15</sup> The very act of hospitality then is more than a reflection of God’s love, but also served as a practical mechanism for an elder to see a newcomer up close and have opportunities to test their teaching and theology. Hospitality places a new teacher in very close proximity to one of the most theologically informed and mature people in the church so that they can be scrutinized. Paul may be commanding elders to be hospitable because one of the byproducts of their hospitality is protecting the church from false doctrine.

Second, if the main motivation for Christian hospitality is understanding the love of God, then elders, as the most mature and godly men in the church, ought to be exemplary in their hospitality. Paul instructs that Timothy and Titus look for men who are above reproach, respected, and well thought of by outsiders. To become such a man means a thorough and well-seasoned understanding of the gospel and God’s goodness and love towards his people. It is such a person who should be highly motivated to show hospitality simply because their life has been deeply shaped by the love of God. On the contrary, it is those people who are immature in their faith with a shallow understanding of where their gifts and possessions come from, who would be normally deficient in hospitality. The regular practice of hospitality is a clear demonstration of an elder’s maturity and understanding of the gospel.

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<sup>15</sup> Mittelstadt, 134.

Third, the role of elders in showing hospitality may be due in part to the continuation of cultural traditions. This is less a stated reason and more of an assumption from how the practices played out. As previously shown, from the Jewish all the way through to the Roman era, it was the expectation that patriarchs and heads of households would be the primary hosts in hospitality relationships. So, when the church is compared to a household (1 Tim 3:5), it is probable that Paul intends for the elders to occupy the place of parents. Even though all Christians are equally God's children (1 Jn 3:1-2), God still calls some of his children to lead and shepherd the others (1 Pet 5). God has established a structure in his church for the good of everyone. So, to translate the metaphor, if elders are the head of God's house (under Christ), it would make sense culturally for them to offer hospitality. The responsibility and the privilege of hosting would naturally fall to them and the people of the church would expect them to act in this way. At this point it can be noted that the Scripture does not directly use this argument or speak of hosting in this way, but it can be inferred from the metaphors being used.

In summary, there are three reasons why it was so important for elders to be hospitable according to the NT: for protecting the church from false teachers, as a practical demonstration that they understand the gospel and God's love, and as was fitting culturally in understanding their office in the church. To shed further light on how early Christians in the post-apostolic age understood hospitality and the role of elders, chapter 3 of this thesis will examine the views and writings of some of the church fathers. This blend of early church history, along with the previously considered biblical and cultural evidence will allow a thorough understanding of what Paul meant when he commanded that elders must be hospitable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HOSPITALITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Studying hospitality-related writings of ancient Christianity (post apostolic era) gives two important perspectives: first, it provides a check on Scriptural interpretations. If the conclusions of the previous section (this thesis's perspective of NT teachings on practices, recipients and motivations for hospitality) are nowhere to be found in early Christianity, or are directly contradicted, it means that the early Christian writers understood the teaching of the NT in a different way than modern Christians do, which is a problem. Now, the early Christian writers are not infallible and modern Christians are allowed to disagree with their conclusions, but it is helpful to have some historical precedent as a baseline. Also, not all of the early sources that will be cited are considered orthodox and some gnostic gospels may be mentioned. The purpose of citing such documents is not to authorize them or to make them equal to the orthodox but to demonstrate the sort of conversation that was happening around hospitality in the first few centuries after the apostles.

The second reason that studying all the early writings is helpful is because it provides an interpretive bridge to modern times. Ancient writers who are reading and interpreting what the NT has to say about hospitality and translating those conclusions into concrete applications in their time helps modern Christians understand how to do the same. In the work of this thesis, understanding how Paul's culture affected his command that elders must be hospitable, the writings of early pastors and theologians is indispensable for teaching how to apply his commands in different contexts. Careful study of ancient documents

demonstrates what Scriptural texts early writers referred to when teaching hospitality and also how they taught their people to obey them.

So, this thesis will take a tour through Christian writings in the first few centuries AD looking at similar topics that have been previously considered: motivations for hospitality, recipients of hospitality, and practices of hospitality. To this list will be added one additional area of interest, namely institutional hospitality. In the first few centuries, writers will begin to discuss the role of institutional, or large-scale hospitality vs. individual hospitality. Understanding the roots of institutional hospitality will be helpful once this thesis arrives at the application section. In general, this look backward will serve to solidify the conclusions of Part 2 and set the table for modern application in Part 4.

### Motivations for Hospitality in the Early Church

Early Christian writers identify two major motivations for hospitality; first, a Christian's self-conception as a person loved by God and second, the spiritual dynamics that accompany hospitality. To clarify, some authors, to motivate Christians to be hospitable, emphasize a Christian's status before God, as one hosted and loved by a generous God. They teach that a hospitable spirit and hospitable practices flow from this mindset. Others though, emphasize the spiritual benefits that practicing hospitality causes directly or indirectly. They talk about the blessings of hospitality, the spiritual fruit that it can produce in one's heart or life.

First, with regard to a Christian's self-conception, it was already pointed out in Part 2 of this thesis that a major motivation for hospitality offered in the Scriptures was understanding the love of God and the human's fundamental posture as guest. So it is no surprise that early Christian writers pick up on this same theme. In one of his books, the

historian Eusebius tells the story of a Christian named Pamphilius who was a martyr in the third century during the Diocletianic Persecution. The story shows the lengths to which early Christians went in identifying and understanding themselves as strangers and aliens in the world. At one point, Pamphilius was arrested and brought in for questioning. Instead of giving his real name or his place of residence, he insisted on being called the names of Jewish prophets and that his homeland was Jerusalem. Even under severe torture he maintained his answers.<sup>1</sup> In this story Eusebius demonstrates the profound sense of identification of being outcasts and exiles that early Christians possessed. This identity mattered so much to them that they preferred martyrdom to giving up that identity.

This is essential the topic at hand, because if the Christian views oneself as a stranger, then they are always being hosted by God and others, creating a profound sense of gratitude and thankfulness. One might object that this motivation faded once Christianity became more legitimate and ultimately became the state religion of the Roman Empire. But this is simply not the case. This identification as strangers continued even after Constantine came to power and converted. Historians recorded that “Christians continued to use the language of stranger status to describe Christian identity”<sup>2</sup> even though the Christian religion was now technically legal. This was a theological stance more than a sociological one. More evidence comes from a letter dated to the second century, a man named Diognetus writes that Christians are:

[I]nhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities ... [they] dwell [there] but simply as sojourners. As citizens they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me : A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 200): 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

But did early Christians connect the dots between viewing oneself as a stranger and exercising hospitality? Augustine demonstrates how this idea of Christian as a stranger leads directly to hospitality. He grounds what he calls the “duty of hospitality” in the acknowledgement that the Christian is fundamentally a stranger hosted by God. He writes in Sermon 61, “You take in some stranger, whose companion in the way you yourself also are, for we are all strangers.”<sup>4</sup> The reason the Christian is hospitable, says Augustine, is because that person knows that they have been shown hospitality. The preacher John Chrysostom makes the same connection in a homily from the book of Hebrews. Speaking of Abraham’s self-understanding as a stranger and alien in the world (Heb 11:13), Chrysostom remarks that Abraham:

[O]ffered [Isaac] up as if he had no son ... the wealth he acquired was common to all passers-by, and this he accounted as nothing. He yielded the first place to others. He threw himself into dangers. He suffered troubles innumerable ... he lived in all respects as belonging to the city yonder.<sup>5</sup>

Chrysostom firmly roots Abraham’s hosting and generosity in his self-conception as a stranger. In a different sermon, Chrysostom instructs Christians not to be too picky about who they choose to offer hospitality. The reason for indiscriminating love, writes Chrysostom, is because “you are servant to Him who healed those who stoned Him, or rather Who was crucified for them ... you are a disciple of Him Who desired the salvation even of them that crucified Him.”<sup>6</sup> Chrysostom appeals directly to the example of Jesus Christ’s enemy love as a motivation to be hospitable to all.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 91.

Even more directly, Paulinus in a letter to his friend in 396 AD writes, “how, then, can we shut out from our small dwellings those whom God has enclosed with us in the single house of this world?”<sup>7</sup> He argues that when Christians meditate on what God has done in giving a good, full, rich earth to all people, it motivates them to be hospitable as well. Later in the letter, Paulinus quotes the sermon on mount, emphasizing how God makes rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. As it is clear, in the ensuing centuries following the apostles, the self-understanding of the Christian as a stranger continued to permeate teaching on hospitality, leading to widespread hosting and generosity. This point will become even more apparent when the spiritual dynamics of hospitality are considered.

Now, to fully explain early Christian motivations for hospitality, there remains an important question to answer: Besides teaching an accurate view of the Christian life, how else did early preachers and teachers encourage their people towards hospitality? How did they motivate and instruct and rebuke in this area? The answer to those questions gives more insight into how they thought about hospitality.

The second motivation for early church writers is the spiritual blessings, sanctification and growth that comes by offering hospitality. Some, reflecting on Jesus’ words in the gospel that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:25) comment about the blessing and growth that comes by giving away one’s property, social standing, health and even life in the cause of hospitality. The bishop of Alexandria in 263, a man named Dionysius writes about the plagues that swept through the city and the Christian response:

Certainly very many of our brothers and sisters in their exceeding love and family feeling, did not spare themselves, but kept by each other, and visited the sick without

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 93.

thought of risk to themselves, and ministered to them continually ... so they died with the others, though most joyfully, carrying others' pains, taking upon themselves their neighbours' diseases ... truly the very best of our have departed this life this way, including some presbyters and some deacons.<sup>8</sup>

The acts of hospitality in Alexandria were motivated by feelings of love but Dionysius goes on to describe the blessedness and growth of the people there who did the work. It was a dual motivation for them, both the love of God and spiritual growth.

In a similar fashion, John Chrysostom commenting on the story of Abraham in Genesis 18 talks extensively about Abraham's humility in hosting and how the act of hospitality had changed him and made him more holy. Chrysostom writes:

[In hospitality] you are giving a favour, not receiving one. You see, this is what hospitality really involves: the person exemplifying it with enthusiasm receives something rather than gives it.<sup>9</sup>

Picking up on the same story as Chrysostom, Maximus of Turin chooses to focus on Sarah, and describing how the process of giving hospitality and preparing food for her guests she was transformed from being barren to being fruitful. He comments that just as Sarah was changed by her hospitality, so Christians are also transformed. He remarks, "Sarah laughs because she is no longer sterile, I laugh because I put down my sins ... she rejoices because by her hospitality she has begotten a son, Isaac, and I am glad because I have acquired mercy with righteousness."<sup>10</sup> Maximus clearly thought there was a direct link between the act of hospitality and one's personal growth. Now, one might argue that God decided to bless her with a child long before she offered hospitality, but the timing and reason for God's blessing

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 139.

is not the direct concern at the moment. Rather, the interest of early Christian authors is the role that hospitality plays in Christian growth.

In these and many more cases, early preachers make the argument that hospitality is motivated by a proper conception of ourselves as guests and strangers and the resulting love that comes from it, but is also motivated by a desire for sanctification and growth. They note the spiritual benefits that come to those who are faithful to practice hospitality. Comparing these early writings with Scriptural motivations reveals a lot of overlap. The main motivations identified explicitly by Scripture are also present in the early church. The one difference would be an increasing emphasis on hospitality as a means to sanctification and spiritual growth, which is only indirectly alluded to in Scripture.

#### Recipients of Hospitality in the Early Church

The Scriptures offered a few major categories of people who are worthy recipients of hospitality. In general these are: strangers, travelling missionaries, and the poor. In addition to commending these types of people for the reception of hospitality, sometimes early church writers would pick up on the language of Matthew 25 when the king (God) answers people confused at his gift of eternal life and blessing for the people on his right, “truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40) The writers sometimes substitute Christ himself as belonging to the “least of these,” noting that Christ identifies with and welcomes love paid to stranger, the poor and those in prison as love paid to himself. He is deeply connected to the “least of these.” This connection enabled writers in the early church to speak of welcoming Christ or hosting Christ as a short form for the poor, the stranger, or others who were “least.” So, what does the evidence say about who the early Christian writers commend hospitality towards?

Pseudo-Clementine, a Gnostic gospel written in the early 200's writes that "this is desirable before God and before people, that we should remember the poor, and be lovers of the kindred and of strangers, for the sake of God."<sup>11</sup> This anonymous author lists many of the important biblical categories, explicitly naming the poor, other Christians and strangers. Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage rebuked Christians for having eyes "overcast with the gloom of blackness, and shadowed in night, [and] do not see the needy and poor."<sup>12</sup> Cyprian, like the Gnostic author, explicitly names the poor and needy. Gregory of Nyssa commenting on the Matthew 25 passage says:

The stranger, those who are naked, without food, infirm and imprisoned are the ones the Gospel intends for you. The wanderer and naked, and ill person without necessities stand in need.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Gregory names the major categories that are cited in Scripture. Indeed, Christians became well known in the first centuries for caring for strangers. Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Aristedes and others, in their apologetic works, point to hospitality offered to the poor and strangers as a reason that Christians should not be persecuted.<sup>14</sup>

Now, missing from most of the above references is explicit teaching about hospitality towards travelling missionaries, a major theme in the NT. But, one of the places this is spoken of is in the *Didache*. The author advocates that "if the traveling teachers teach accepted doctrine, the believers should receive them with the same degree of hospitality with

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>14</sup> Pohl, 33.

which they would receive the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> The author continues with specific instructions, commanding that the travelling missionary “is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is a need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet.”<sup>16</sup> This is an interesting development because in the NT Paul and his travelling companions often stay for months or even longer in cities where they are ministering. But it is clear that the tradition has been abused and there were numerous false teachers circulating and taking advantage of Christian hospitality.

In summary, there is very little difference between Scriptural and early Christian emphases on the recipients of hospitality. All of the major groups represented in Scripture as deserving are also noted in early church literature.

### Practices of Hospitality in the Early Church

Scripture frequently describes hospitality practices that fell in line with cultural expectations: greeting strangers kindly, offering food, drink and other provisions; hospitality offered by heads of households, giving of gifts, sending travellers on to their next destination. But how did early Christians describe the practices of hospitality? What were their emphases? What did preachers implore their people to do?

One of the earliest references is in the writings of Tertullian, who in a letter to his wife commending Christian marriage writes that:

The sick are visited and the indigent relieved with openness. Alms are given without danger of retaliation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Arterbury, 123.

<sup>16</sup> *Didache*, 11.4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Oden, 150.

Tertullian alludes to the practices of Christian hospitality, discussing the giving of provisions, presence and money as part of a healthy marriage. Cyprian in his 7th letter to his congregation in Carthage urges people “to be scrupulous in your care for the widows, the sick and all the poor, and further, that you meet the financial needs of any strangers who are in want out of my own personal funds which I have left in the care of our fellow Presbyter Rogatianus.”<sup>18</sup> This is helpful in describing how some churches arranged the duties of hospitality. For the church in Carthage, the bishops and presbyters handled the costs of hospitality for strangers while the rest of the people managed the local needs. Basil, in one of his letters to the governor of his area describes the practices of his ministry saying, “whom do we harm by building a place of hospitality for strangers, both for those who are on the road and for those who need medical treatment on account of sickness?”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to write that he has also constructed buildings to teach people skills for employment. It is a vivid description of what hospitality looked like in 372 AD.

John Chrysostom preached on the story of Abraham multiple times commending to his people Abraham’s practices demonstrated in Genesis 18. He says in Homily 41 on Genesis, “it is not part of hospitality to worry about [whether you know the person or not]: friendliness involves sharing one’s possessions with all comers.”<sup>20</sup> In a separate sermon he specifically tells his people how to act towards strangers, telling them to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 160.

Be inquisitive, sit before the doors, personally welcome those who come. Even though you may not wish to take them into your houses, at any rate in some other way receive them, by supplying them with necessities.<sup>21</sup>

In short, the practices of hospitality change very little in the centuries following the apostles. What early Christians command each other to do is what people were always commanded to do: welcome kindly, give provisions, send them on their way, meet their needs.

### Institutional Hospitality in the Early Church

One of the most significant developments in the early church from a hospitality perspective was the rise of institutional hospitality. Institutional hospitality means the building of hospitals, inns and other buildings for widespread care of strangers and the poor. Pohl makes the case that the rise of institutional hospitality is attributed to the constellation of a few major factors, namely: the increasing availability of resources that the church possessed, the rise in legitimacy of Christianity (particular post-Constantine), and the increasing scale of need as the Roman empire stratified economically and then declined.<sup>22</sup> The first major institution spoken of in the literature was the hospital at Caesarea which was built in 370.<sup>23</sup> The area had experienced a major famine and Basil commissioned the hospital to provide physical care and food to people who needed it. The hospital was an immediate success and Basil went on to found a variety of institutions who cared “for the sick, for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>22</sup> Pohl, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 44.

travelers and for the poor.”<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Nazianzen called Basil’s hospital a “storehouse of piety”<sup>25</sup> and a wonder of the world.

Though the hospital was originally an outgrowth of a hospitable impulse, John Chrysostom began to call people out for ignoring personal duties of hospitality due to the existence of a hospital. Chrysostom suggested that each person make a room in their house for hosting guests, “a place to within to welcome ‘the maimed, the beggars, and the homeless.’”<sup>26</sup> He was worried that personal hospitality would decline as people relied on larger institutions to do the work. Jerome, in a letter from 397 notes that he is selling some property in Italy so that he can build a monastery and a hospice (shelter for poor and sick) in Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> Justin Martyr also mentions the establishment of a role he calls “president” who took the offering from a Sunday service and used it to

[C]are for the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in need, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us. In other words, the president takes care of all who are in need.<sup>28</sup>

This is sufficient evidence to show that institutional hospitality, though more efficient, became worrisome to many pastors as it represented a threat to the character virtue of personal hospitality. This is especially significant as this thesis turns to consider the implications and applications for modern Christians.

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<sup>24</sup> George W. Forell, *History of Christian Ethics*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 125.

<sup>25</sup> Pohl, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Oden, 222.

<sup>28</sup> Oden, 244.

## Summary

The evidence is plentiful in early Christianity that the traditions of hospitality continued in the life of the church. Hospitality was a major emphasis for pastors, especially as the Roman Empire declined and the needs of the poor increased. Importantly, there is no detectable drift or trajectory from the Scriptural teachings on hospitality, but the practices, motivations and recipients of hospitality remain relatively constant. This provides some direction for the modern church as it attempts to be faithful to the commands of Paul.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### APPLICATION FOR THE MODERN CHURCH

Appropriate application involves three distinct phases. First, in order to make applications for the selection, training and work of a modern Christian elder requires defining what is different culturally between modern Canada and the Mediterranean of Paul's day. These distinctions and differences do not negate everything that has been said culturally, biblically and historically regarding hospitality, but it provides the context into which these truths need to be imported. After all, there is not a one to one correlation between modern Canada and the Mediterranean and therefore the way that hospitality was practiced will not be the same. These differences must be stated clearly in order to avoid oversimplification in application.

Second, in light of the cultural differences that exist, this thesis will attempt an argument for transcultural principles and ideas that can be imported and applied in the modern world. The point of studying Paul's commands is not just for information's sake, but for use in the real world of the church in Canada and beyond.

Finally, these transcultural principles need to be spelled out in concrete practice. This thesis will offer practical applications for the selection, training and work of a modern Christian elder. Let it be noted that this third part of the application may not be useful in other contexts, but at the very least will provide an example for how faithful churches might take the same steps for themselves.

### Cultural Differences between Canada and the Ancient Mediterranean

Obviously there is a great cultural gap between the world of Paul's day and modern Canada. There is no room in this thesis to discuss all the ways that the two cultures are different and so the comments here will be confined to hospitality-related differences.

The first major difference between the two cultures is the role of non-church institutions in the provision of hospitality. These institutions can vary widely and in different parts of Canada, hospitality services are provided by a variety of commercial, provincial, federal and not-for-profit entities. For instance, health care is both provided and funded by individual provinces, but the federal government also bears some responsibility. For instance, the federal government provides financial aid to the provinces to relieve the cost burden. Also, the federal government and the federal courts have the final legal opinions in controversial cases including care given towards the unborn, the elderly and the fatally ill. To provide an example, a province or city is not free to defund abortion clinics. The right of health institutions to provide abortion and the scope of their practice are nationally mandated. In addition, private health care can be accessed in some cases through private corporations or not-for-profit institutions. This is seen in hospice care, where a variety of religious organizations and other not for profit institutions provide for those unable to care for themselves.

Also, considering the hospitality practices of offering a kind welcome to strangers, which included refugees, travellers, homeless, and the poor; the services of hosting and feeding such people are provided by both corporate hotels, government buildings and shelters in churches. They are paid for in some cases by the federal government, the individual province, a city, a denomination or a foundation. Sometimes it is a combination of a few of

these entities. All this to say that hospitality has become very complex and very institutional, in the broadest sense of that word. Individual citizens are almost universally excluded from the provision of health care and hosting unless they are employees of the government or private providers. This modern world is very different from Paul's day which featured mainly private hospitality and only the embryonic state of inns, hotels and more commercialized health care. Also, Paul would have had no idea that the government would find itself, or choose to be responsible for practices of hospitality. It would likely have been incomprehensible to him. Therefore, the church in Canada and the elders of the church are not entering an area void of attention and effort, but rather a somewhat crowded marketplace funded and run by a variety of institutions. The complexity is somewhat staggering.

A few important implications flow from this state of affairs. First, Canadian Christians find themselves in a world where because of historic Christian beliefs about abortion and euthanasia, it is difficult to maintain a presence in the hospitality world. Increasingly, Christian institutions have come under criticism, threat of lawsuit and loss of funding for their refusal to provide such services. Also, recent federal law regarding euthanasia has made it unclear if Christian physicians and Christian hospices will be legally able to refuse to provide euthanasia to people who request it. This difficult situation will inevitably lead to the decline of Christian participation in institutional hospitality, though it does not and will not affect private hospitality.

A second implication is that even if Christians desire to provide hospitality to people who need it, they must 'compete' to even have the chance to participate. Because there is a variety of options and a variety of funding sources, it isn't clear where exactly Christians can help.

A third implication is that the role of individual churches, ordinary Christians and elders will change from place to place, even inside the same city depending on what services are available and who is paying for them. Churches in more rural areas will likely need to focus on different aspects of hospitality than urban churches. For instance, rural churches are unlikely to find people living on the streets of their one-stoplight town, but that does not mean that hospitality is not needed. It just means that it takes a different form from more urban centres.

A second major difference between modern Canada and Paul's Mediterranean is the lack of unity and cooperation between churches. Many of the assumptions of hospitality and the role of elders depend on centralized control and deployment of resources. It also relies on first-hand knowledge of who is needy and what kind of needs they have. But in a city of five million people like Toronto, there are hundreds of denominations and thousands of churches represented, most of whom have little to do with each other. Even in smaller towns which might only have a dozen churches, it is still difficult to share information and harmonize responses of hospitality. Coordinated efforts at hospitality are made very difficult by the lack of communication and lack of a cohesive strategy. This is far different from the world of Paul, where each city basically had one church, even if it were composed of a few separate house churches. This simplicity made communication and execution of hospitality much easier. In addition, most cities were much smaller than modern cities, making the scale of hospitality more manageable. A modern church in Canada is not simply dealing with governments and secular non-profits, it is also dealing with all kinds of Christians and churches, some of whom may have little interest in working together. Even if all the churches spontaneously decided to work together, communication about needs and strategy is a huge

job. The truth is that to understand and coordinate a response to hospitality related needs in a city of one million people is almost unfathomably large and complicated.

A third major challenge has to do with institutional hospitality and the issue of scarcity. As Pohl writes in her book, both the NT writers and early Christian authors said little about issues of scarcity.<sup>1</sup> Paul or Luke never discuss how to deal with more poor people than a hospice had room for. They never mention a lack of food. Instead, there was an assumption that properly distributed resources would bring enough to everyone. But with the size of the church relative to the number of people who need provisions, a place to sleep, etc. the modern elder will have to exercise a great deal of wisdom to know how to be hospitable in a sustainable way. It is likely that elders will make difficult decisions, in light of the kingdom of God and the other churches in their city, which kinds of people to help and in what way they can help them. Pohl notes that the failure to be careful and strategic in hospitality related ministries will quickly lead to burnout.<sup>2</sup> For an elder to be a leader and a shepherd in hospitality, they must go above and beyond personal hospitality to craft a strategic and long-term response to the people who are struggling in their city or town.

So, the modern Canadian church faces a world that is strikingly different from Paul's. It differs in the complexity of hospitality, the unity between churches and the sustainability of hospitality. These differences, though large, do not doom hospitality to the dust-bin of Christian ideas. Instead, there are transcultural principles at work that function as easily in Paul's society as in modern Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine D. Pohl *Making room: recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 127-130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

## Transcultural Principles of Hospitality

The first principle is that even though institutional hospitality is changing and will continue to change, elders and all Christians should be diligent in practicing private hospitality. The cultural differences listed above do not negate the traditions of hospitality observed in the Mediterranean context. There is clear evidence from both the Scriptures and early Christianity that Christians ought to be diligent in private hospitality.

Modern Christians should act like Abraham and Lot: being observant for opportunities to show hospitality, offered kindness to those in need, providing practically (food, drink, a place to sleep) for those who come across their path. The existence of a large, well-funded, government run hospital does not negate the need for private hospitality. In fact, it seems that the existence of such institutional spaces can function to reduce private hospitality as people mistakenly believe that all of the needs are being met. This was true in the time of John Chrysostom, who railed against the loss of private hospitality in the fifth century and it is certainly true in modern Canada. But institutional spaces, though perhaps more efficient than private spaces, are not as adept at addressing the emotional, social and spiritual parts of a person. Private hospitality, in all its forms, is as needed and necessary as ever.

This doesn't mean that Christians need to abandon institutional spaces. Christians ought to be as active as possible in public institutions. Perhaps in the years to come, there will again be a place for Christian hospitals, hospices and other kinds of facilities because they refuse to abort or euthanize but instead choose to serve all kinds of people with dignity and love. Perhaps Canadian culture will move so far from Scriptural principles that Christian hospitality in the public sphere will have a meaningful role to play in the future. However,

such development will likely be difficult, slow and complex. Therefore, the primary focus is on the personal practice of hospitality and secondarily on the public institutional practice.

Second, the motivations for hospitality are transcultural. As this thesis previously pointed out, the Christian motivations for hospitality were not primarily related to need, or to worry about punishment from the gods, or desire for social advancement, but arose out of love for God and neighbour. Therefore, even though Canadian culture dilutes some of these other motivations, the gospel of Jesus Christ remains the same and therefore the motivations for Christian hospitality ought to be as strong as ever. The practices and the recipients of hospitality may change, but if the impulse for hospitality is high, it will always find an expression. Modern Canadian Christians and elders need to cultivate love for strangers and a corresponding care for their needs.

Third, elders have a continuing role in hospitality. As elders are commanded to be above reproach in every area, it follows that they ought to be leaders in providing hospitality. There is no reason Scripturally or culturally for Paul's commands to be left behind. Instead, elders ought to carefully lead and shepherd their people, with their example and words to grow in hospitality.

In summary, the motivations of hospitality, the role of the elders and the private practices of hospitality remain constant. Some of the recipients may change and the public practice may change, but these other principles are as applicable to modern Christians as it was for Timothy and Titus.

## Final Applications

Now this thesis comes to the very heart of what it means for modern Canadian churches to apply Paul's commands for elders to be hospitable. Despite a different culture, both the practices and motivations for hospitality still apply to modern elders in both private and public settings. This thesis will close by suggesting a number of ways that hospitality applies in the selection, training and work of the elder, though many of these suggestions may be applied by all Christians no matter the maturity of their faith.

One of the main applications that concerns both the selecting of elders and the practice and life of an elder is the truth that an elder's belief in the gospel must not be merely intellectual but ought to manifest itself in concrete actions. Some of the traits that Paul commands to be present in an elder are difficult to detect. It is not always easy to determine how gentle a person is, how far above reproach they are and how much they love money. But some of the traits, like hospitality, managing his household, being the husband of one wife are more easily known because they are observable in a man's actions.

To understand a potential elder's grasp of the gospel and their position in Christ, their practice of hospitality must be examined. If they are stingy with possessions and gruff towards outsiders, it shows a misunderstanding of God's love and a faulty view of the Christian's relationship to wealth and other people. So, a potential elder should be examined, questioned and observed in his practice of hospitality. How does he greet newcomers? How often does he have people over to his house, especially strangers, poor people, single parents, socially awkward people and non-Christians? Does he live in a house or apartment that is conducive to hosting and feeding people? How does his wife and family (if applicable) participate in the practice of hospitality? These are important diagnostic questions that not

only to serve to establish the qualification of hospitality, but also serve as an indirect way of assessing his understanding of the gospel and God.

Perhaps a modern church might include in its training and selection process an interview with a non-Christian who knows the potential elder well. This non-Christian friend could be asked about how they relate to the potential elder and what kind of welcome they have received from him. Soma Communities, a church outside Seattle does exactly that when interviewing potential elder candidates.<sup>3</sup> Considering a potential elder's orientation to hospitality is a helpful way of assessing their understanding of the gospel.

A related issue to an elder's understanding of the gospel is that an elder's practice of hospitality shows their orientation towards people who are outside the church. In the list of qualities that must be present in an elder, most of the qualities are internal, related to his family dynamics and personal holiness. But two of the qualities are also related to his orientation towards outsiders, namely hospitality and how well he is thought of by outsiders. These two are the only qualities that are more external than internal. Considering a potential elder's practice of hospitality will give a good sense of how he thinks and feels about non-Christians and Christians from other churches. If he never has non Christians over for dinner, or is tight-fisted with his money, it sheds light on a sinful or immature attitude towards outsiders.

A discerning elder who is training a potential elder, could do one of two things in this regard. The older, more experienced elder when hosting neighbours or the other people in need should invite the potential elder over to observe how such hospitality takes place. There is no better way to explain the practice of hospitality than to observe it directly as it is

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Parnell "An Elder Qualification We Often Forget." Available from <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/an-elder-qualification-we-often-forget>; Internet; accessed Aug 2016.

happening. In addition, an elder who is training a younger man might instruct him to plan a meal with someone in need and come with him to see how he does and how he might grow. In more urban areas, a potential elder could walk around the downtown area and simply invite those asking for money to eat with him at a local restaurant. In smaller towns or rural areas, a potential elder could work through a local food bank or community association that might have contact with people in need. The application is for an elder-in-training to both observe and practice hospitality if it an area of weakness. But this can also apply to men who have been elders for a longer time. Elder boards should consider scheduling a review for elders every few years to check on how they are doing with hospitality and all the other character traits that Paul commands.

Another application comes from 1 Peter 5:3 which instructs elders to lead their congregation not in a domineering way, but by being examples. Elders should consider, in their hospitality how they might use those times to teach and train their people. Perhaps it would be helpful for them to have congregants over whenever they are hosting non-Christians in order to show them how to host in a gospel-centred way. Also, elders ought to lead hospitality not just personally but also corporately. One example from a church in Ottawa, ON is that they host a meal at the local food centre on Friday nights. Anyone who uses the food centre is invited to come and eat with the hosting church who provides the food. All the people who come (church members and people from the community) work together to prepare, cook and clean up the meal. This is a very concrete way to teach their congregation about how to host people different from them and to help their people make friendships with non-Christians. Other examples of teaching hospitality might include an

elder inviting all the people on his street to a party or dinner and inviting a few church people along to observe and help, or hosting a travelling missionary or pastor in their home.

Finally and most simply, when selecting elders, Paul's command must be taken seriously. This may seem silly, but it is sometimes the case that churches focus on certain qualities to the exclusion of others. Churches look for elders who are excellent teachers or have obedient children, but hospitality tends to be neglected. It is important for churches electing and training elders to carefully consider Paul's command and give it the requisite importance. The elder is the example for the whole flock, the model for behaviour and if hospitality is not taken seriously for the elders it is more than likely that the church will not embody it either.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has definitively demonstrated that a proper understanding of Paul's Mediterranean context is essential to understanding and applying his commands regarding hospitality. Existing literature that has extensively covered hospitality in antiquity still fails to answer the question of applying Paul's commands, both for Christians in general and for elders in particular. This thesis serves to bridge that gap.

First, it was demonstrated that understanding of the recipients, practices and motivations for hospitality as seen in Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures was essential for correctly understanding Paul's culture. There are elements of each culture's approach still present when Paul was writing and together they provide a mosaic against which one can understand the challenges and opportunities in Paul's day.

In Chapter three, these cultural practices of hospitality were held up against the teachings of the New Testament to understand how Paul and the other writers were challenging or changing the practices and motivations for hospitality. It is important to note that one of the major shifts was a change in motivation for Christians, as Paul in particular broadened and extended the notion of theoxenic hospitality and used it as a primary motivation. Also, the New Testament includes specific direction for elders to be hospitable, which is a new category of moral instruction not present in any of the other cultures.

Chapter four demonstrates that the early church in the post-apostolic years continued the apostle's teachings on hospitality. There was no significant deviation from

Scriptural teachings in practices, motivations or recipients. However, there was one new area of focus, which was institutional hospitality. There was some literature dedicated to understanding and discussing the role that larger institutions like hospitality or poor houses might play in Christian hospitality.

Finally, Chapter five outlined how modern Christians should understand and apply Paul's commands in light of his context. It detailed the significant challenges faced in regions like Canada where hospitality is quite complex. Ultimately, private hospitality remains vital to both ordinary Christians and elders and there must be careful thought given to wider participation in the hospitality industry in Canada.

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