

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

We are attempting to measure ourselves according to the characteristics the apostle Paul listed for mature spiritual men.

- A man must be like this in order to be considered for leadership in the church.
- A man ought to be like this regardless any position in the church.

We first saw that you were to be “blameless” and we compared it to getting a background check. It’s a summary characteristic that says there is no glaring problem or inconsistency in your life.

Then we looked at the phrase “husband of one wife.” It literally translates as *one woman man*. We saw that it has nothing to do with your marital status but is referring to sexual purity. Whether you are single or married you are to practice purity and “maintain your own vessel [physical body] with honor.”

The third characteristic we encountered was “temperate.” It described a person with discernment and balance in his thinking and judgment who is not given to unbiblical extremes.

Then we discussed what it means to be “sober-minded.” We saw Paul use that word in the sense of not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. Instead you learn to be content as the part of the body God has made you.

“Good behavior” had to do with how we adorn our lives to attract rather than detract from the Gospel.

Now we come to “hospitable.”

1 Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, **hospitable...**

It's a compound Greek word that means *to love strangers*. Pretty opposite our modern stranger-danger thinking! Of course, first century Eastern culture had its share of robbers, thugs, and thieves; just ask the Good Samaritan. Even in those days you weren't obligated to take just anyone in to your home.

There were many reasons regular folks needed others to show hospitality: poverty, persecution, widows, and orphans were in abundance. There were no hotels in our sense and the inns were notoriously evil places. Often they were brothels and travelers would certainly be robbed if not also beaten.

Christian ministers travelled from place-to-place needing to be taken in. Interesting factoid about itinerant ministers. A document called the Didache gave some instruction about how much hospitality to show them. One author, commenting on and quoting from the Didache, writes,

Generosity was obviously thought to be a prime Christian virtue, but in practice one had to be careful, for others could easily take advantage of the Christian. This was especially the case with "false" prophets who showed up and wanted the congregation to feed them. The instruction was not to "receive" any prophet who asked for food or money while speaking "in a spirit" (Did. 11:12), and not to allow any "true" prophet (who did not do that) to stay longer than two or three days unless he was willing to settle down, learn a craft, and "work for his bread" (Did. 12:2-5).¹

The church really began on a footing of hospitality. Thousands of travelers had filled Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover and Pentecost. Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit-baptized church meeting in the Upper Room began sharing the Gospel. The thousands who were saved in the opening weeks of the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem wanted to hang around for a while and learn more about Jesus. They had nowhere to stay. So the local believers took them in and housed and fed them.

In Acts we read,

Acts 4:34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, Acts 4:35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

¹ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>

It was a unique time and a unique situation. Still it gives an example to us of a type of hospitality in action.

A couple of famous verses on hospitality are First Peter 4:9 and Hebrews 13:1-3.

1 Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

“Without grumbling” is a reminder to have the correct attitude towards others. We should not consider it a duty or a responsibility to be hospitable but rather a privilege.

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

Hebrews 13:3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also.

"Forget" means *neglect*. They were neglecting "entertaining strangers." The Hebrew Christians were drawing-back, not opening up their homes.

"Unwittingly entertained angels" is probably a direct reference to an incident in Genesis where Abraham was visited by three individuals who turned out to be the Lord and two angels. The two angels went on to Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's nephew, a man named Lot, showed them hospitality. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah assaulted Lot's house seeking to rape these strangers!

Here's the point: Even a carnal believer like Lot understood the duty of showing hospitality - and he did so at great personal risk. To neglect hospitality would be to subject travelers to the dangers lurking outside the sanctity of Christian homes.

The "prisoners" were those jailed for their faith in Jesus. In many countries in the world prisoners depend upon family and friends for their daily necessities. The state doesn't provide food or clothing! First century Christians were likewise "mistreated" by their jailers and were depending upon their brothers and sisters in Christ for aid.

While many think hospitality can be a gift of the Spirit, we are **all** enjoined to practice being hospitable. In Romans we read,

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

Romans 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Romans 12:12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

Romans 12:13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Here it is in a list of traits that ought to characterize us all. "Hospitality" is one of them. The word "given" indicates to pursue it actively.

We normally think in terms of hospitality to friends and family. This word is not about them. It's more like what Jesus said in Luke 14:12-14,

Luke 14:12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.

Luke 14:13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.

Luke 14:14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Dinner with "friends... brothers... relatives... and rich neighbors" is OK but it isn't the kind of hospitality we're talking about.

How do we do it, really, in our modern setting? Think of it in terms of what Jesus said. We are to welcome people into our lives. The very first level of being hospitable, then, would be to welcome people, to invite them, to come to know Jesus. Or to welcome them, to invite them, to church.

Most of the strangers we deal with are strangers to the Lord in need of that kind of welcome.

Notice that being hospitable doesn't always mean you are the host. Jesus was being hospitable when He was the guest at dinners with tax collectors and sinners!

We are hospitable, too, when we look past barriers in our dealings with strangers. One author put it this way:

Christian hospitality was a subversive act that obliterated societal barriers involving gender, race, economic condition, and citizenship status, and also directly attacked the often deadly devaluing of the personhood of 'undesirables'. The extension of hospitality was a moral statement with moral overtones that offered a dramatic and often effective witness to the world and was crucial to the growth of the early church.

It's not wise to open-up your home to just any stranger. If a person has genuine needs, in our society there are often alternatives - hotels that are not brothels, for example. If you want to give a beggar money, tell them instead you'll buy him a meal.

I think the real emphasis for us is on being available and approachable to welcome folks to the feast that is a relationship with Jesus. That will sometimes involve opening up our homes. It will always involve opening up our hearts.