

# WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

## *The Church is a Family that Welcomes Strangers*

**Romans 12: 9-13**

In our final study, but by no means the end of the subject, we will consider the church as a family that welcomes strangers and new-comers. The stranger and alien in the midst of His people has always held a special place in God's heart. They should in ours also. Israel was a stranger in the land of Egypt, and we are strangers and aliens in this world since we have become followers of Jesus and been adopted into heavenly citizenship. This love of strangers should be a hallmark of the local church family.

### **I Biblical Basis for Being Warm & Welcoming to New-Comers**

- A. It is encouraged generally to all members of the church  
Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, I Peter 4:9
- B. It is recognized as a worthy attribute in qualifying for church benevolence  
I Timothy 5:9-10
- C. It is mandated as a criteria for all leaders  
I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

### **II Understanding the Full Scope of Being Hospitable**

- A. Two words used for hospitality in the New Testament  
**φιλοξενία philoxenia Meaning:** love of strangers  
**ξενοδοχέω xenodocheo Meaning:** to entertain strangers
- B. Being open and loving to strangers among us  
Philoxenia — all locations except I Tim 5:9
- C. Being hospitable, inviting strangers into our heart, church, & home  
Xenodocheo — I Timothy 5:9

### **III Reasons Why We May Lack Hospitality**

- A. Fear
  - 1. Fear that we might be offensive or intrusive
  - 2. Fear that we might welcome a regular attender
  - 3. Fear of not knowing what to say
  - 4. Fear of sinister intent (a new problem in the USA)
- B. Natural shyness and introversion
  - 1. Related to fear, but really not knowing how to be social
  - 2. Introverted people require expense of energy to be outgoing
- C. Cultural norms—we live in a regional culture which is either naturally isolated or indifferent to people not known: "Its none of my business, and mine is non of theirs."
- D. Worst of all: we like it the way it is

God cares deeply about everyone; He is especially interested in those who find their way to His family. When someone visits our church family more than half of the battle is won in bringing them to faith in Christ, or folding them into a new church family so that they will continue to grow in Him. We need to cultivate a love of strangers and hearts that are open to all whom God sends our way. Will you vow to be one of His welcoming and hospitable ambassadors? Will you allow God to change your heart so that loving strangers will be natural and transparent?

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

**Romans 12: 9-13 NASB**

For the overseer must be hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word

**Titus 1:8 NASB**

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

**Hebrews 13: 2 NASB**

