

## **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HOSPITALITY?**

I have witnessed a very disturbing trend among many in the church over the last few years. Having opportunities to preach in meetings and the like in numerous places, I am able to meet brethren from across the brotherhood. Let me say at the outset, I love my brethren, and I love the brotherhood. But I am seeing a serious decline in hospitality among members of the church. I have visited some places where no one took the initiative to invite us to sit with them during the services, or introduced themselves and asked who we were or where we were from, or invited us to have lunch with them after services, etc. Are we treating visitors to our services in the same way? What is the first impression a non-Christian gets when he comes to visit us? What about one who is a member of the church and is visiting to find a new home congregation? Whether or not we show hospitality may determine whether a non-Christian ever visits another service of the church, or someone places membership with the congregation here.

As Christians, we are to be a hospitable people. Paul wrote that we are to be “given to hospitality” (Rom.12:13). Elders are to be those who are “given to hospitality” (1 Tim.3:2) and “lovers of hospitality” (Titus 1:8). We are to “use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Pet.4:9). The Hebrews writer encourages us, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb.13:2) [the word translated “entertain strangers” is the same word translated “hospitality” in the verses above]. John reminds us, “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers” (3 John 5).

Let me make a few suggestions. Take the time to go up and speak to visitors to our services. Introduce yourself, and seek to learn about them. Give them a bulletin and a Sermon Advantage. Offer to take them to the appropriate Bible class. Invite them to sit with you and your family during services, since it may be that they do not know anyone here. Ask them to fill out a visitor’s card that we might have a record of their being with us, and so we might express appreciation to them with a letter. After services, introduce them to other members of the church. Invite them out to eat with you, or to your home for a meal. Invite them back to the next service, and let them know what time we meet. Let us never be guilty of slighting our visitors in any way. As the old saying goes, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.”