

HOSPITALITY

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9)

Hospitality involves being kind and considerate to others. This is the very essence of Christian teaching. Jesus taught us to love others in the same way we want to be loved (Matt. 7:12). If we see a brother in need, and have no pity on him, we do not have the love of God within us (1 Jn. 3:17). We should never “grumble” about extending hospitality. By helping others we are helping Jesus (Matt. 25:40). Here are a few Scriptures about hospitality to consider.

- A leader in the church must be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:8).
- A widow must be hospitable in order to be supported by the church (1 Tim. 5:9-10).
- All believers are to “practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13).
- We are not to forget to practice hospitality for some by doing so have entertained angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2).
- Abraham welcomed three men into his home and the Lord said through them: **“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah you wife will have a son” (Gen. 18:10).**
- Lot welcomed two men into his house that turned out to be angels (Gen. 19:2). These angels saved his life!
- Laban welcomed the servant of Abraham into his home and then sent his sister Rebekah back with that servant to be the wife of Isaac (Gen. 24:28-61). This random act of hospitality played a key role in bringing Christ into the world!
- Job always had his door opened to strangers (Job 31:32).
- Lydia welcomed Paul and Silas into her home (Acts 16:15).
- On the day of Judgment God will remember that we gave hospitality to strangers (Matt. 25:35).
- Etc.

Now let us consider a mystery involving hospitality. Paul wrote to the Romans: **“Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine” (Rom. 16:13 KJV).** It seems that the mother of Rufus extended hospitality to Paul. It is not immediately clear how or when this happened. With this in mind, let us like a detective, try to solve this mystery.

First, let us begin with some evidence from the background of Paul’s letter to Rome.

- Paul was in Corinth when he wrote this letter. At that time he was staying with Gaius, one of the leaders of the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23).
- Paul had planned many times to go to Rome but had been prevented from doing so (Rom. 1:13).
- Now Paul planned to visit Rome on his way to Spain (Rom. 16:23-24).
- Phoebe, was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. Cenchrea was only a few miles from Corinth. Phoebe was apparently planning a trip to Rome. She had been a great help to many people including Paul, so he urged the brethren in Rome to give her any help she needed (Rom. 16:1).
- Paul dictated this letter to a scribe named Tertius (Rom. 16:22). Apparently this letter was sent with Phoebe.
- Even though Paul had never been to Rome he sent special greetings to 27 specific individuals in Rome (See Rom. 16:3-15).
 - 9 of those to whom he sent greetings were women (Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus).
 - 3 were Paul’s relatives (Andronicus, Junias, and Herodion).
 - How did Paul know all of these people in Rome when he had never been to Rome?

- Please consider that Paul obviously knew them before they went to Rome and “may” have sent them there to evangelize and prepare for his coming.

WHO WAS RUFUS?

The name “Rufus” means “red”. This name is only found two times in the Bible.

- # 1 **“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mk. 15:21).**
- # 2 **“Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too” (Rom. 16:13).**
- We “assume” that both Scriptures refer to the same man and both are associated with Rome.
- It is generally believed that Peter helped Mark to write the Gospel of Mark in the city of Rome.
 - Historians tell us that Peter died as a martyr in Rome.
 - We know Mark was with Peter when he wrote 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:13).
 - We know that Peter wrote from “Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13). Babylon means “confusion.” It is thought Babylon, in this verse, refers to Rome as it was the principal source of confusion in the world at that time.
 - We know Mark was with Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24).
 - We also know that Rufus was in Rome for Paul sent greetings to him in his letter to the Romans.
- While Mark was writing his Gospel in Rome he described the crucifixion. Note: **“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mk. 15:21).**
- Apparently the brethren in Rome had never hear of a “certain man” named Simon of Cyrene, but they had heard of Alexander and Rufus for they were apparently in Rome at the time. Hence Mark identified Simon, whom they didn’t know, as the father of Alexander and Rufus whom they did know.
- Hopefully this piece of evidence will help us to solve the mystery of how the mother of Rufus was also a mother to Paul.

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND SIMON OF CYRENE

Remember, we are working like detectives to solve the mystery of how the mother of Rufus was also a mother to Paul. To solve this mystery we are looking for any clue that might be helpful. So let us consider how Paul and Simon of Cyrene “might” have come in contact with one another at Antioch in Syria.

- **“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord “Acts 11:19-21).**
- Since Simon was from Cyrene, it is “possible” that he was one of the men mentioned in this verse who went to Antioch and preached to the Greeks.

- We know for sure, however, that the Apostle Paul did come to Antioch at this time: **“News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:22-26).”**
- It is therefore “possible” that Paul and Simon met one another in Antioch.
- If this is true, it will help us to understand how the mother of Rufus was also a mother to Paul.

WHERE DID PAUL LIVE WHILE HE WAS IN ANTIOCH?

- The Scriptures do not tell us where Paul lived while he was in Antioch.
- If we are correct in “assuming” that Simon of Cyrene was in Antioch, then it is logical and quite possible that Simon extended hospitality to Paul and invited him to live with his family.
 - There were certain disciples in the early church who were more famous than others. Lazarus was famous because Jesus raised him from the dead. Mary was famous because Jesus cast 7 demons out of her and she was the first to witness his resurrection. Barnabas was famous for selling a field and giving the money to the apostles, Etc.
 - Simon of Cyrene was famous for he was the man who carried the cross for Christ.
 - Paul was also famous as he had once been a prominent persecutor of the church.
 - We know Paul stayed in Antioch for a whole year teaching great numbers of people. We know he obviously stayed somewhere! Staying with Simon of Cyrene would be a logical place for him to stay as both were famous. Further, Simon could give Paul accurate insights into the crucifixion since he was closer to Christ at that time than any other disciple.
 - While we are “assuming”, it is also a logical assumption that Simon’s contact with Christ led him to become a Christian. We know that Rufus was “chosen in the Lord”. It is also logical to assume that his brother and mother were also “chosen in the Lord”.
 - The fact that Paul considered the mother of Rufus to also be his mother may well refer to their time together in Antioch. If these assumptions are correct the family of Simon offered hospitality to Paul and mother of Rufus treated Paul like her own son for an entire year!
 - This would explain why Paul sent greetings to both Rufus and his mother in his letter to Rome.
 - It was not uncommon for the apostles to have women assume the role of mothers to them. Jesus said: **“Truly I tell you,. . . no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (Mk. 10:29-30).**
 - Remember, the jury cannot make a decision “beyond any doubt”, but “beyond a reasonable doubt”.
 - If these clues are correct, we have solved the mystery “beyond a reasonable doubt” of how the mother of Rufus was also a mother to Paul.

CHRISTIANITY AND CONVENIENCE

Everyone knows that it is not convenient to have visitors in your home. It would be easier to send them away or perhaps give them enough money to stay in a motel. The brief inconvenience of hospitality, however, often pays rich dividends.

- Job wrote: **“I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them. The one who was dying blessed me; I made the widow’s heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth (Job 29:12-17).** None of these important ministries were convenient! Job was rewarded for his hospitality, however, and the Bible describes him as a man who was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:1).
- Please note that at the Judgment Jesus expected everyone to be hospitable. Everyone is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, receive strangers, etc. (Matt. 25:31-46) Jesus said about helping others: **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).**
- When Abraham extended hospitality to three angels it turned out to be a blessing for through them the Lord promised him that his wife would give birth to a son (Gen. 18:1-15).
- When Lot extended hospitality to angels they saved his family (Gen. 19:1-26). They blinded the Sodomites and told Lot that God was going to destroy Sodom. Then they grasped the hands of Lot, his wife, and his daughters and led them safely out of the city. **“As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, ‘Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away’” (Gen. 19:17).**
- The widow at Zarephath was the victim of a famine. She only had a handful of flour and a little oil to provide one last meal for herself and her son. When she extended hospitality to Elijah, however, the Lord worked a miracle so she didn’t run out of flour and oil for three years until the famine was over (1 Ki. 17:9-16).
- When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles he instructed them to **“search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave” (Matt. 10:11).** Jesus continued: **“As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town” (Matt. 10:12-15).**
- It is not good to refuse hospitality to someone that Jesus has sent!

HOSPITALS (Hospitality for the sick)

The following information is condensed from an article by John S. Dickerson in the Christian Research Journal, volume 42, (2019).

Regarding hospitals in America the Primary Evidence reveals an overwhelming Christian presence in the founding of these hospitals. These Christian hospitals gave birth to the modern

hospitals and medicine we enjoy today. These hospitals began as Christian charities because, back in the 1800s, there were no hospitals as we know them today. The best (and most expensive) doctors only made house calls, which meant that only rich people could afford to see a doctor. The poor had to go without doctors. And so Christians — motivated by Christ’s teaching to “care for the least of these” — began building hospitals where the poor could receive the medical care they could not afford. This was the birth of today’s hospital.

Of the three oldest hospitals in the United States (each of which remains in the top twenty today), all three were started by overtly Christian organizations for Christian purposes of charity.

- Pennsylvania Hospital — founded in 1751 by Quaker Christian Dr. Thomas Bond and Benjamin Franklin, ranked number fourteen in the nation today.
- New York–Presbyterian Hospital — founded in 1771 by Episcopal Christian Samuel Bard; ranked number ten in the nation today. (Note: Founder Samuel Bard established an Episcopal church even while he led some of the earliest medical schools in the history of the United States.)
- Massachusetts General Hospital — founded in 1811 by Rev. John Bartlett, who was motivated by Christian charity for the poor; ranked number four in the nation today.

As we have said, these three oldest hospitals in the United States were each started by Christians, and each remains a leader in the innovation of modern healthcare practices. Christian pastors cast the vision for these hospitals. Christian donors supported these hospitals, providing the bricks and beds. And Christian universities provided the medical faculty and first doctors for these hospitals.

PURE RELIGION

“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:26-27).

Note the contrast between “worthless” religion, and “pure and faultless” religion. Worthless religion only involves “words” while “pure and faultless” religion involves “deeds”. **“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:14-17).**

Please consider this parable: **“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ‘I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For**

all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”(Lk. 18:9-14)

Which of these two men do you think would give you hospitality? The Pharisee had plenty of words but we have no record that he ever helped anybody!

The word translated as “look after” in James 1:27 is “episkeptomai”. It means to “care for”, or “visit with help”. The Pharisees talked, but didn’t care for orphans and widows. The Pharisee in the parable was focused on himself and his words prove it. He was like a man looking in the mirror and forgetting what he saw. His religion didn’t help anybody. He honored God with his lips but his heart was far from God. He couldn’t keep a tight reign on his tongue and his religion was worthless! He was like the priest and the Levite who saw a man in need and passed by on the other side (Lk. 10:30-32).

The person with “pure and faultless” religion is like the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:33-37). The Good Samaritan didn’t talk but he care for the wounded man. He bandaged his wounds, put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn, took care of him, and paid for his expenses.

Jesus said **“Go and do likewise”! (Luke 10:37)**