



As we gather in our groups to begin our fall term, many of us are meeting in homes with generous hosts. They have welcomed us into their homes, provided a comfortable setting, and perhaps offered refreshments. This is the modern definition of hospitality. The ancient view of hospitality looks similar at first glance, but a closer look shows higher expectations and much greater responsibility.

As we learned Sunday, the word “hospitality” itself comes from Latin words suggesting “love of strangers.” In biblical times the concept entailed the provision of food, shelter, and safety for strangers, sometimes even at the expense of one’s own essentials. In Genesis 19:1-8 we see a prominent example of this when Lot goes to extraordinary lengths to protect two strangers, who unknown to him, are angels. Unfortunately the ancient (and unbiblical) view of women as little better than property obstructs his model of hospitality. To be clear, in the Old Testament God teaches the Israelites to love and cherish their mothers, wives, and daughters, and improves their status within the culture by restricting abuses of divorce (Deut. 22), giving women property rights (Num. 27), and celebrating their productivity and intelligence (Prov. 31) among others things.

In light of these and other teachings, Lot clearly acts contrary to God’s commands and follows the culture when he offers his daughters as victims for the Sodomite abusers. But having said that, he exemplifies a biblical view of hospitality in caring for and protecting the strangers. Besides inviting them under his roof (instead of the town square), washing their feet, and providing them food, he himself goes outside the house to confront the threatening neighbors. He goes to great lengths to protect them because “they have come under the protection of his roof” (8).

In these ways Lot’s story is much like Matthew’s in Matt. 9:9-13. Neither is seeking his own benefit, but the benefit of others, even at potential cost of personal reputation and property. They are engaging strangers in meaningful relationships rather than merely entertaining and they are disclosing themselves to others rather than seeking approval. Neither Lot nor Matthew understand it at the time, but their hospitality will eventually lead to the loss of everything they have. Lot will gain his life escaping Sodom, and Matthew will receive the wandering life of a disciple, but it costs them everything else.

### Discussion Questions

Hospitality in the modern sense bears only the risk of social awkwardness, but biblical hospitality is a dangerous thing. What would biblical hospitality look like in our culture if we were engaging people, seeking to be known, and desiring the wellbeing of strangers?

What potential costs might come with biblical hospitality in our culture?

How can we move from a hospitality defined by entertaining our friends to a hospitality characterized by engaging strangers?