

Dr. David deSilva, Cultural World of the New Testament

Session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of deSilva, Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. David DeSilva **explains the significance of patronage and reciprocity in first-century Mediterranean culture**. He argues that **understanding this social system is crucial for interpreting the New Testament**, as it shaped everyday interactions and religious beliefs. DeSilva **highlights the roles of patrons, clients, and mediators**, emphasizing the importance of **grace (charis), gratitude, and loyalty** within these relationships. He uses examples from **ancient literature and the life of Jesus** to illustrate these concepts and their relevance to New Testament studies. Finally, he **contrasts public benefaction with personal patronage**, showing how the latter fostered enduring relationships.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva, Cultural World of the NT, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Introduction → The Cultural World of the NT).



**DeSilva_CultureNT_
Session03.mp3**

3. Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity

Patronage and Reciprocity in the First-Century Mediterranean World: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How did individuals in the first-century Mediterranean world typically seek assistance for their needs, and how does this differ from modern Western practices?
2. Explain the roles of a patron and a client in a patronage system and what obligations each party held.
3. Beyond simple assistance, how could patrons increase their power and influence?
4. What is a broker or mediator in this social context, and how did they function? Provide an example.
5. How did the concept of "friendship" function among social equals in the ancient Mediterranean?
6. How did the agrarian class participate in systems of patronage and reciprocity, and what consequences did they face for failing to reciprocate?
7. What is the difference between public benefaction and personal patronage?
8. How did people in the ancient world conceive their relationship with gods and deities? Use examples.
9. What are the three primary meanings of the Greek word *charis* and how do they relate to the cycle of grace?
10. How does the story of the Roman centurion in Luke 7 illustrate the dynamics of patronage, brokerage, and faith?

Answer Key

1. In the first-century Mediterranean world, people primarily sought assistance through personal relationships with those of greater means rather than impersonal systems like stores or banks. This differs greatly from modern Western practices where we rely on impersonal institutions to meet our needs.

2. A patron was a person of greater means who provided assistance, while a client was the recipient who was obligated to show gratitude and loyalty, often publicly praising the patron. This created a cycle of mutual obligation within the society.
3. Patrons could increase their power base by collecting many clients through their generosity. Clients would then support their patrons' political ambitions or advancement through service.
4. A broker or mediator was someone who could connect a client with another patron who could provide assistance. An example would be Pliny, who could mediate access to the emperor Trajan.
5. Friendship among social equals was similar to patronage but without the inherent inequality, with individuals showing favors and looking out for each other's interests as opposed to competing with each other. Pilate and Herod Antipas are an example of this dynamic.
6. Even among the rural population, there was an expectation of exchanging favors, gifts, and services, emphasizing mutual assistance. Failing to return a favor could lead to exclusion from vital networks of support.
7. Public benefaction was when a wealthy individual gifted something to the public at large, like sponsoring games or a building, enhancing their reputation. Personal patronage was the formation of long-term relationships, with continual favor and gratitude.
8. People often saw their relationships with gods through the lens of patronage and clientage, where gods granted favors, and people offered worship in return. The priest's role, the *pontifex* (bridge-builder), was to mediate the exchange.
9. *Charis* primarily meant favor or generosity, the gift itself, and gratitude or thanks. These three senses create a cycle where a patron's favor leads to a gift and the recipient shows gratitude, creating a continuous cycle of grace.
10. The story of the centurion showcases patronage, with the centurion building the synagogue for the elders who then act as brokers for his needs. The centurion demonstrates great faith in Jesus, whom he acknowledges as a powerful patron.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of reciprocity in maintaining social order in the first-century Mediterranean world, explaining how it functioned within different social strata.
2. Discuss how the concepts of patronage, clientage, and friendship influenced religious practices and the understanding of relationships with the divine in the Greco-Roman world.
3. How does the concept of *charis* in the ancient world inform our understanding of New Testament writings, and how does the biblical concept of grace differ from or build upon this social understanding?
4. Compare and contrast the responsibilities of patrons and clients. Include how these responsibilities extend to intergenerational relationships, or those who would inherit the bonds of previous generations.
5. In what ways did the understanding of graceful giving and receiving impact moral and social interactions in the first-century Mediterranean? Include specific discussion of the ideas of both Seneca and Ben Sirah and how they both agree and differ on certain points.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Patron:** A person of greater means who provides assistance, resources, or support to others.
- **Client:** A person who receives assistance, resources, or support from a patron and is obligated to show gratitude and loyalty.
- **Reciprocity:** The exchange of favors, gifts, or services as a means of maintaining social relationships and obligations.
- **Broker/Mediator:** An individual who connects a client with a patron who has the needed resources or favor.
- **Charis:** A Greek word that has multiple meanings including favor, grace, gift, and gratitude and encompasses the entire cycle of giving and receiving.
- **Acharistia:** The opposite of *charis*, meaning ingratitude or the failure to reciprocate grace for grace.
- **Public Benefaction:** The act of a wealthy individual providing gifts or services to the public at large for social and personal gain.
- **Pistis:** A Greek word meaning faith or trust, also understood as dependability and loyalty within relationships of patronage or friendship.
- **Apistia:** The opposite of *pistis*, meaning distrust, disloyalty, or unfaithfulness.
- **Pontifex:** Latin term for priest, literally meaning "bridge builder," highlighting their role as mediators between the gods and people.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. David DeSilva's lecture on "Patronage and Reciprocity" in the cultural world of the New Testament:

Briefing Document: Patronage and Reciprocity in the First-Century Mediterranean World

Introduction

This document summarizes Dr. David DeSilva's lecture on patronage and reciprocity in the first-century Mediterranean world, focusing on how this social system shaped relationships and influenced the understanding of key concepts like grace and faith in the New Testament. DeSilva contrasts this system with modern Western approaches to needs fulfillment, emphasizing the relational nature of the ancient world.

Key Themes and Concepts

- **Patronage as a Core Social Institution:** In the first-century Mediterranean world, personal relationships were the primary means of accessing resources, status, and assistance, rather than impersonal systems like stores, banks or applications.
- **Quote:** *"There, for many needs beyond food in the marketplace, for many needs, your first order resource is a person who might grant you what you need. A relationship, another person who had what you needed, was the primary means of access..."*
- **Patrons and Clients:** **Patrons:** Individuals with greater means who could provide resources, favors, or assistance to others (e.g., money, land, employment, access to other patrons). They gained power and status through their generosity, which created a network of clients.
- **Clients:** Individuals who received assistance from patrons and in turn, obligated to demonstrate gratitude, loyalty, and service to the patron.
- **Quote:** *"So, a patron, someone who has greater means than myself, might provide money, or grain in time of shortage, or employment when I'm looking for that... I would go to someone of means and petition for such a favor."*

- **Reciprocity and the Ethos of "Giving Back":** The system was built on a strong ethos of reciprocity. Receiving a favor created an obligation to repay it through service, loyalty, publicizing the patron's generosity, and by continuing a relationship of mutual support.
- **Mediators/Brokers:** Those who could connect clients to patrons who had the resources needed. They often held positions of power due to their connections and ability to facilitate relationships.
- **Quote:** *"...a patron's greatest gift might be access to another patron... we can also talk about that first patron as a mediator, as a broker..."*
- **Patronage Among Social Equals:** While often associated with inequality, patronage dynamics also existed between social equals, where the language of "friendship" often signified mutual favor-giving and looking out for each other's interests. An example was given of the friendship established between Pilate and Herod Antipas, where they began to show each other favors after initially being rivals.
- **Quote:** *"The language of friendship in the first century is very much the language of patronage between equals, between social equals."*
- **Patronage in Agrarian Society:** This system was not limited to urban elites but was also essential among rural and agrarian populations, where neighbors would exchange favors and support to ensure mutual survival and inclusion in social networks.
- **Quote:** **"What Hesiod is looking at is the willingness of neighbor A to help neighbor B...and then the wisdom of neighbor B making sure he gives back and more to neighbor A..." **
- **Public Benefaction vs. Personal Patronage:** Public benefactions (e.g., sponsoring games, building temples) enhanced a benefactor's public reputation but did not create personal relationships or obligations.
- Personal patronage involved one-on-one relationships, creating long-term obligations and mutual support networks.
- **Quote:** *"Public benefactions...was a gift to everyone in general and, therefore, a gift to no one in particular." In contrast, when patronage occurs one-on-one, "this initial act of giving could very well initiate a lifelong relationship."*

- **Patronage as a Model for Divine-Human Relations:** The system of patronage and clientage was often used as a model for conceptualizing relationships with the gods, with divine beings seen as the ultimate patrons who grant benefits and in return are due worship and thanks. Priesthood was viewed as a brokerage role, connecting humans to the divine.
- **Quote:** *"People in the ancient world conceptualized their relationship with the gods...along the lines of patronage and clientage."*
- **Emperor Cult:** The emperor was often viewed as the ultimate patron, providing peace and prosperity. This was expressed through worship in temples and with sacrifices, as an expression of extreme gratitude for the benefit bestowed upon the populace.
- **Quote:** *"All people around the Mediterranean address him thus, as Augustus, in accordance with their estimation of his honor, revering him with temples and sacrifices across islands and continents...matching the greatness of his virtue, and repaying his benefactions toward them."*
- **"Do ut des" vs "Do quia dedisti":** While Greco-Roman religion is often framed as a system of *do ut des* ("I give so that you may give"), there was also a common understanding of *do quia dedisti* ("I give because you have given"), similar to the Jewish/Christian concept.
- **Quote:** *"One finds many instances in the Greco-Roman world of a sense of do quia de disti...I give because you have given. And that is essentially the driving force of religion in both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish world."*
- **Grace (*charis*):** In the first century, "grace" (*charis*) was not primarily a religious term, but an everyday word associated with patronage and reciprocity. It had three main meanings:
 - The willingness of a patron to give a favor.
 - The gift itself.
 - Gratitude or thanks.
- **Quote:** *"In their time, grace was an everyday word. It really belonged out there in every context, everywhere that favors were given, received, and returned. And Paul and other New Testament writers reached to that world in order to talk meaningfully about what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ."*

- **The Three Graces:** The image of the three graces represented the cycle of giving, receiving, and returning benefits and was a common symbol of the social dynamic of patronage.
- **Quote:** *"He writes that there are three graces since there is one for bestowing a benefit, one for receiving a benefit, and a third for returning it."*
- **Gratitude as Sacred Obligation:** Gratitude was considered a sacred duty, and ingratitude was equated with sacrilege. Failure to return a favor was a violation of the social order.
- **Quote:** *"Gratitude was considered to be a sacred obligation, while ingratitude could be spoken of as the equivalent of sacrilege."*
- **Graceful Giving:** A virtuous giver should give for the benefit of the recipient, not for their own gain. They should also give to those likely to be grateful.
- **Quote:** *"It's essential that a giver give in the interest of the recipient, of the beneficiary, not with a view to the giver's own gain..."*
- **Faith (pistis):** The concept of *pistis* (faith/trust) was often understood within the context of patronage, representing trust in a patron's reliability and a client's loyalty and faithfulness.
- **Quote:** *"Pistis, the Greek word that we commonly translate faith or trust, is used to talk about trust in a patron's reliability or a friend's reliability to give what was promised. And it's also used to talk about the client's dependability, his or her reliability to maintain faith, to keep faith with a particular patron or friend."*

Implications for New Testament Interpretation

- **Understanding Paul's Language:** The language of grace, faith, and reciprocity in the New Testament is deeply rooted in the everyday social experiences of first-century people. Understanding these cultural contexts is crucial for accurate interpretation.
- **Challenges to Social Norms:** New Testament authors may both utilize and challenge the social norms of patronage, for example, Paul tries to prevent the wealthy patrons in the churches he founded from thinking that by providing hospitality, they were thereby creating a network of clients, rather than a church of equals.

- **God as Patron:** The idea of God as the ultimate patron is a natural fit within this cultural framework. Christian teaching on grace and salvation was understood in this context.
- **The Centurion's Faith:** The story of the Roman centurion in Luke 7 illustrates the dynamics of patronage, mediation, and faith. The centurion's request for healing was facilitated by his previous generosity toward the Jewish elders, who acted as brokers, and the centurion's faith/trust in Jesus' power.
- **Quote:** *"So, he sends those whom he has benefited...they act as mediators, as brokers, approaching someone that they can approach...on behalf of someone who needs something. And they do it because they themselves know themselves to be recipients of the centurion's favor."*

Conclusion

Dr. DeSilva's lecture reveals the pervasive influence of patronage and reciprocity in the social, religious, and political life of the first-century Mediterranean world.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for a richer and more accurate reading of the New Testament texts and the concepts it presents. These themes will be further explored by analyzing the letter to the Hebrews, looking at how the concept of patronage illuminates the letter's meaning.

5. FAQs on deSilva, Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Patronage, Reciprocity, and Grace in the First-Century Mediterranean World

1. **How did the concept of "patronage and reciprocity" differ from modern Western approaches to obtaining needs and services?** In the first-century Mediterranean world, personal relationships were paramount. Instead of impersonal institutions like stores or banks, people sought assistance from individuals of higher social standing (patrons) who could provide resources, employment, or access to others who had those resources. This system was based on the values of generosity and gratitude, which formed the "glue" that held society together. In contrast, modern Western societies often rely on impersonal systems for obtaining goods, services, and financial assistance, with a greater emphasis on individual autonomy.
2. **What roles did patrons and clients play within this system of patronage?** Patrons were individuals with greater means who provided assistance (money, land, jobs) to clients, those who sought that assistance. Clients, in return, had an obligation to demonstrate gratitude, often publicly, and to remain loyal to their patron. This system involved a continuous cycle where clients would perform services for patrons. Patronage was not just about charity, it was about establishing and maintaining long-term relationships that benefited both parties, although the benefit to the patron was often one of enhanced social standing and influence.
3. **How did the idea of brokerage or mediation function within the social structure of the ancient Mediterranean world?** A broker or mediator was someone who connected a client with a patron who could provide the needed resources. This person might not have direct resources but held influence with the patron, giving them the ability to facilitate the client's request. The mediator's power derived from access to and influence with powerful individuals, often those at the highest level of society, which would be used to the benefit of their clients.

4. **Was patronage only a system for the elite and those who were socially unequal?** While patronage existed within hierarchies, it also extended to relationships between social equals. Such relationships were referred to as friendships, where favors were exchanged without a patron/client dynamic. This system of mutual support also operated at the local level, even among the agrarian classes, where neighbors exchanged favors and support to ensure the survival and success of the local communities. The principle of reciprocity applied across social strata and ensured a basic level of social safety.
5. **How did public benefaction differ from private patronage, and how were their effects distinct?** Public benefactions, such as sponsoring public events or building monuments, provided general benefits to the public and enhanced the benefactor's reputation, however, it did not create personal bonds with the individual citizens who benefited. Private patronage, on the other hand, created personal, long-term relationships between a patron and a client. The reciprocal and mutually beneficial dynamic of these patron/client relationships bound individuals to each other in a way that public benefactions could not.
6. **How was the concept of *charis* (grace) understood in the first-century Mediterranean world and how did it relate to patronage and reciprocity?** *Charis*, often translated as "grace," had multiple meanings in this cultural context. It referred to a patron's willingness to give (favor/grace), the gift itself, and the recipient's gratitude. This cycle of grace, where favor should be met with favor, was essential to maintain healthy relationships. Failure to show gratitude (*acharistia*) was viewed as a grave offense because it disrupted the cycle of mutual benefit, and this was considered morally disgraceful.
7. **What were the key elements of graceful giving and receiving within the patronage system, and how did they affect the involved parties?** Graceful giving involved giving without expectation of a specific return, with the focus on the needs of the recipient and not with the self-interest of the giver, who could seek to gain a favor that was owed to them, or a political advantage in the exchange. Those who were viewed as ungraceful would reproach and shame those who were receiving gifts. A graceful recipient, however, recognized their debt to the giver and would think about ways to show gratitude and return the favor, either through testimony, service or loyalty. This created a continuous cycle of giving, receiving, and reciprocating, all of which were equally important, and was essential for the healthy functioning of the system.

8. **How do these concepts of patronage, reciprocity, and *pistis* (faith) apply to understanding the New Testament?** The New Testament often uses the language of patronage to explain the relationship between God and humans. God is portrayed as the ultimate patron who gives gifts of salvation, and humans as clients who are called to respond with gratitude, loyalty, and service. *Pistis* (faith) in this context, is not solely about belief but also about trust in God's reliability and faithfulness, as well as human dependability to be faithful to their relationship with God. Understanding these dynamics provides important context for interpreting the theological and ethical dimensions of New Testament texts.