

Hebrews 13:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Analysis

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hospitality (philoxenias, φιλοξενίας, literally 'love of strangers') was crucial in ancient world lacking hotels, especially for traveling Christians facing hostility. 'Be not forgetful' (mē epilanthanesthe, μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε) warns against neglecting this duty under pressure—persecution made hosting strangers risky, but believers shouldn't abandon this practice.

The motivation, 'some have entertained angels unawares,' references Abraham hosting three visitors who proved to be divine messengers (Genesis 18:1-15) and Lot entertaining angels (Genesis 19:1-3). The Greek elathon (ἐλάθον, 'unawares' or 'without knowing') suggests we never fully know whom we're serving. Every stranger could be Christ Himself in disguise (Matthew 25:35-40), making hospitality sacred duty.

This challenges modern Western Christianity's privacy-focused, entertainment-oriented culture that views home as personal castle rather than ministry resource. Biblical hospitality isn't hosting parties for friends but welcoming strangers, particularly fellow believers in need. Early Christians' radical hospitality contributed to Christianity's rapid spread—traveling evangelists and persecuted believers found welcome in Christian homes. Reformed theology sees hospitality as stewarding resources for kingdom purposes, recognizing that all we possess belongs to God and should serve His purposes, including caring for His people.

Historical Context

First-century travel was dangerous and expensive. Most people traveled on foot, stayed in homes of family or friends, or risked unsafe public inns. Early Christian missionaries and refugees from persecution depended on believers' hospitality. Romans 16 lists many who hosted Paul and church gatherings. 3 John 5-8 praises Gaius for hospitality toward traveling ministers. Conversely, Diotrephes' refusal of hospitality is condemned (3 John 9-10). The cultural context made hospitality essential, not optional. Jewish tradition also emphasized hospitality, recounting Abraham's example. Early Christian 'Didache' gives detailed instructions for hosting traveling prophets, showing how central this practice was to early church life and mission.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How are you using your home and resources to practice biblical hospitality toward strangers, particularly fellow believers?
2. What fears, inconveniences, or preferences prevent you from welcoming strangers as you should?
3. In what ways could you support Christian missionaries, refugees, or persecuted believers through hospitality?

Interlinear Text

τῆς	φιλοξενίας	μὴ	ἐπιλανθάνεσθε	διὰ	ταύτης	γὰρ
G3588	to entertain strangers	not	Be	thereby	G3778	for
	G5381	G3361	G1950	G1223		G1063
ἔλαθόν	τινες	ξενίσαντες	ἄγγέλους			
unawares	some	have entertained	angels			
G2990	G5100	G3579	G32			

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 25:35 (Parallel theme): For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Romans 12:13 (Parallel theme): Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

1 Peter 4:9 (Parallel theme): Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

Matthew 25:43 (Parallel theme): I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Leviticus 19:34 (Parallel theme): But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Job 31:32 (Parallel theme): The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller.

Matthew 25:40 (Parallel theme): And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Titus 1:8 (Parallel theme): But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

Isaiah 58:7 (Parallel theme): Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Romans 16:23 (Parallel theme): Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.

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