Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Ever Met an Angel?
Scripture: Hebrews 13
Code: BQ32211

Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1,2)

Strangers, like **brethren** (v.1), can refer to unbelievers as well as believers. Our first responsibility is to our brothers in Christ, but our responsibility does not end there. “While we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10). Paul is just as explicit in 1 Thessalonians: “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men” (5:15). “All men” includes even our enemies. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:43–44). Even the most worldly of people love those who love them, Jesus goes on to say (v. 46).

The danger of “being taken” is no excuse for not helping someone in need. A **stranger**, by definition, is someone we do not know personally. Consequently, it is easy to be deceived when helping a stranger. A person who asks us for ten dollars to buy food for his family may spend it on alcohol or drugs. We should use our common sense in deciding how best to help him, but our primary concern should be for helping, not for avoiding being taken advantage of. If we help in good faith, God will honor our effort. Love is often taken advantage of, but this is a cost that it does not count.

In the ancient world **hospitality** often included putting a guest up overnight or longer. Inns were few, often had poor reputations, and were expensive. Among Jews and people of the Near East in general, hospitality, even to strangers and foreigners, was a great virtue. Christians are certainly to be no less hospitable.

Hospitality is a New Testament standard for overseers, or bishops (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). Pastors and other church leaders are to have open homes, ready to serve and meet the needs of others. Showing hospitality to strangers is the work of a spiritual woman (1 Tim. 5:10). In other words, hospitality should be a mark of all Christians, a basic characteristic, not an incidental or optional practice.

For by this some have entertained angels without knowing it is not given as the basis or motivation for hospitality. We are not to be hospitable because on some occasion we might find ourselves ministering to angels. We are to minister out of brotherly love, for the sake of those we help and for God’s glory. The point of the second half of verse 2 is that we can never know how important

and far-reaching a simple act of helpfulness may be. We minister because of need, not because of any consequences we are able to foresee. Abraham went out of his way to help the three men who were passing by his tent. He did not wait to be asked for help but volunteered. It was an opportunity more than a duty. In fact he considered the greater service was to himself, saying “My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by” (Gen. 18:3). At the time, he had no idea that two of the men were angels and that the third was the Lord Himself (18:1; 19:1). And if he had known they were not, it would have been no less right for him to be hospitable.

In a sense, we always minister to the Lord when we are hospitable, especially to fellow believers. “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (Matt. 25:40). To feed the hungry, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the imprisoned in Jesus’ name is to serve Him. To turn our backs on those in need of such things is to turn our backs on Him (v. 45)

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