

PURSUE HOSPITALITY

Ponder: Can you love people you don't know?

Scripture: “. . . distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality . . .”

(Romans 12:13, NKJV).

I enjoy having friends over to my home for a meal and visiting. I want them to feel welcome, and I like feeling welcome in their homes, too. There's nothing wrong with that, but it really doesn't fulfill the Biblical meaning of hospitality.

In the midst of a lengthy list of qualities faithful Christians ought to have, we find hospitality (Romans 12:9-21). “Given to hospitality” is literally “pursuing hospitality.” This hospitality is a compound word. The first part is “philos,” meaning the warm, friendship kind of love. The second part is “xenos,” meaning a stranger. Properly, then, hospitality is warm, loving friendship exercised toward strangers.

No wonder Paul said to “pursue” hospitality! This behavior does not come instinctively. We are more comfortable associating with people we already know and trust. Warm, loving friendship toward strangers takes discipline and effort! It's easy to simply ignore strangers while involving ourselves with our family members and friends. Thus the Hebrews writer warns us not to “forget to entertain strangers” (literally, “show hospitality”), “for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (13:2).

Undoubtedly the inspired writer had in mind the time that Abraham demonstrated remarkable hospitality to the angels who visited him just prior to the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). The three appeared as men, and Abraham treated them accordingly. However, one of them was the Lord and the other two were angels. Though they were strangers to him, Abraham showed courtesy, love, and generosity as he provided them with abundant food and drink. Even at his advanced age, Abraham actively participated in serving his guests.

Once when Jesus was invited to a supper, He told his host not to hope for a return invitation from his relatives and wealthy neighbors. Instead, he should invite “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” That would be real hospitality, and the Lord would repay him at the resurrection (Luke 14:12-14).

Have you forgotten to show hospitality? How hard are you running in pursuit of it?