

Loving Strangers

By Bill Scheidler

Xenophobia or Xenophilia?

Xenophobia is a word that is in the news a lot lately. It is a word that comes from the Greek language and is made up of two words, *xenos* and *phobia*. *Xenos* means “stranger, foreigner or alien.” *Phobia* means “fear.” Together they literally mean “fear of strangers.”

Today we want to focus on another word, xenophilia. This word is also made up to two words—*xenos* and *philia*. *Philia* means “love.” Together these words mean the “love of strangers.”

Today we are believing that perfect love will cast out fear (I John 4:18). We want God to take the fear out and replace it with His love.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

The church is the answer to xenophobia. The church needs to be a reflection of the heart of God.

What is a stranger?

This morning we want look at both the Old and New Testaments to develop a biblical understanding of God’s attitude toward the stranger.

In the Old Testament when it speaks of strangers it usually referred to a foreigner who was living within their national boundaries or a sojourner from another nation who was traveling through their territory.

In the New Testament references to strangers was far more inclusive and could include anyone that you do not know or someone outside of the community of the redeemed.

Key verses relative to strangers (to renew our mind)

1. Exodus 23:9

Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

We were all strangers at some point. We may have been mistreated as strangers or well-treated as strangers. In either case we learned something of what it is to be a stranger. This verse tells us that we are not to mistreat or oppress the stranger. If we are not careful we will have a double standard as to how we treat people. There are things that we often allow ourselves to do to strangers that we would never do for a friend.

2. Leviticus 19:34

The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

We are to love him as ourselves; remember where you came from. Someone loved you. We are to have one standard for both (Lev. 24:22; Deut. 27:19).

3. Leviticus 23:33

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

In a sense this meant that they had to make financial provision for the stranger and the poor. They had to figure this into their budget.

4. Deuteronomy 10:17-19

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

God's nature is to love and care for all. He especially singles out four groups of people, the fatherless, the widow, the stranger and the poor.

5. Deuteronomy 23:7

You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land.

We are not to hate the sinner (Egypt) or those who are backslidden (Edom). We hate sin but love the sinner. You might say, "But you do not realize what they have done!"

6. Job 31:16-22, 31-32

Job was going through the challenge of his life. In the process he was giving himself a spiritual check up to be sure that he had not brought this calamity on himself. In doing so Job reminded God that he had been faithful to the basic duties of a covenant child.

If I have kept the poor from their desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, 17 or eaten my morsel by myself, so that the fatherless could not eat of it 18 (But from my youth I reared him as a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow); 19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or any poor man without covering; 20 If his heart has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; 21 If I have raised my hand against the fatherless, when I saw I had help in the gate; 22 Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket.

31 If the men of my tent have not said, "Who is there that has not been satisfied with his meat?" 32 (But no sojourner had to lodge in the street, for I have opened my doors to the traveler)...

7. Jeremiah 7:5-7

For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

God promises blessing and security to those who reach out. The condition of keeping the blessing of God is sharing it with others.

8. Malachi 3:5

“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien-- because they do not fear Me,” Says the LORD of hosts.

God will judge those who refuse to minister to the stranger. Notice the sins that are put into the same category as this sin. When we have no compassion for the stranger, it is evidence that we do not fear the Lord.

9. Matthew 25:31-44

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.” 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” 40 And the King will answer and say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Jesus said that when we reach out to the stranger, we do it to Him. When we ignore the stranger we ignore Him. When we persecute the stranger, we persecute him.

10. Luke 14:12-14

Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

True biblical hospitality is not what we normally call hospitality. Biblical hospitality is need orientated (Hospitals). It presumes a need on the part of the one who receives it and the ability to meet the need on the part of the one who gives it. It is not “keeping company” or having “open house.” It is an absolutely selfless act.

11. Romans 12:13

In the context of Paul discussing what it is to “behave as a Christian”, he mentions that we are to be “given to hospitality.” Literally it should read, “pursuing hospitality.” This is the same word that Paul used when he told us that we should “press” toward the mark of the high calling in Christ.

It means “to eagerly seek after, to run swiftly to catch something or someone; earnestly pursue or promote a cause.”

It is a word that was used of a “persecutor.” It has the idea of setting a goal and pursuing it with intensity.

Paul was saying, “Don’t just wait for something to happen, run after strangers and track them down.” Hospitality is not a passive virtue.

We are to go out of our way to minister to strangers.

12. I Timothy 3:2

Here Paul gives the qualifications for leadership in the House of God. Those desiring leadership are to be “hospitable.” This word literally means “a lover of strangers” (See Titus 1:8). The word that is used here is a compound word made up of *xenos* and *philia*. This quality is a mark of Christian maturity.

13. Hebrews 13:1-2

Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

The point here is that you never know who you are ministering to, who this person will become and what they will accomplish when God gets hold of their life.

14. I Peter 4:8-9

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

This deals with our attitude when ministering to others. It is to be an expression of “fervent love” (hot, boiling, at full stretch). It is to be without grumbling.

The Greek here means, “without murmurs;” that is, without complaining of the hardship of doing it; of the time, and expense, and trouble required in doing it...It greatly enhances the value of hospitality, that it be done on our part with entire cheerfulness. –Barnes Notes

15. III John 5-6

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well...

Note the two phrases (each of them can mean two things):

“You do faithfully”

- a. You have acted as the faith required you to act in all that you have done both to the brethren at home and to strangers.
- b. You make whatever you do for these needy ones a believing act or a work of faith.

“In a manner worthy of God”

- a. You treat these individuals just as you would treat the Lord.
- b. You treat these individuals as true representatives of God, that is, the way in which God Himself would treat them.

Practical Time

How can we put this into practice?

Don't wait to feel like being hospitable. It needs to be a response of faith.

Within the Local Church

We can...

1. Reach out to those that you do not know at church.
2. Reach out to visitors or guests in our midst.
3. When you invite people into your home include strangers or those that you do not know very well with those that you already know well (inside or outside of the church).
4. Open you home to small group ministry.
5. Attend a small group. Come with the idea of ministering.

Outside of the Local Church

We can...

6. Participate with activities designed for reaching out to the poor (CAP).
7. Be observant to the life that happens around you.
8. Be open to all you meet. Ask God for divine appointments.

In All Instances

We can...

9. Order our lives in such a way as to make room for strangers (time, activities). In some cases you can just include them in what you are already doing.
10. Order our finances and budget in such a way that makes room for the stranger (money).

Closing

Have those who are new in the last 6 months to stand. Also pray for country—xenophobia.