

Pilgrims Among Pagans – Family Visiting Theme 2015

1 Peter 2:11–12 ¹¹ *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

In the verses immediately preceding the above text, the Apostle Peter describes Christians this way: *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* Peter sees all Christians as having a holy calling from God to make known to the world the riches of God’s grace to sinners. Then, in the words of our text, he tells us how to go about making Christ known – by the way we live, both in our abstinence from sinful behavior and by our good deeds.

The Apostle Peter characterizes the Christian life as that of “sojourners” and “exiles.” Sojourners are people who have journeyed from their home to live in a foreign place. They are resident aliens. Exiles are wanderers or pilgrims looking for a new home. Christians are sojourners because we have been born from above and are not of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We are exiles because in this world “we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for a city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14).

Being an alien and pilgrim requires a certain style of living. Negatively, it means abstaining from sinful lusts and worldly passions. Positively it means devoting yourself to honorable conduct and doing good deeds.

We live in a world dominated by evil desire and fleshly lusts, which are often called “good”, and their pursuit justified as everyone’s right to the “pursuit of happiness.” But Peter warns that such desires are life threatening for they “war against the soul,” that is, they seek to rob us of our new life in Christ. We are all called to fight against sinful desires.

By not going along with the world in gratifying every evil desire, they may ridicule us, calling us “backward,” “narrow minded” or “intolerant.” They will accuse us of being aloof and self-righteous. Our response should be to devote ourselves to doing good. Eventually, either when they come to faith in Christ, or at the Last Judgement, they will change their tune and praise God for the change He has made in His people. Our good deeds should be transparent. They should make clear that the reason we do them is because of the change that God has worked in us. That way God will get the praise for them. Knowing that our good deeds will bring praise to God should spur us on to ever-greater obedience. Jesus commands, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven” (Matt. 5:15).

Too often we either flee from the world, or join the world (just a few steps behind to feel better about ourselves), or both. But the Bible calls us to be different in order to make a difference. You will not make a difference if you are not different. You will make *little* difference if you are just a little different.

The difference we are called to is holiness. Live in such a way that others take note. They may be attracted. They may be repelled. But they will take note. Our goal is to convict and change our world for the glory of God. As a new creature in Christ, God has put you in the unique position of being salt and light. We are his ambassadors, who by our words and deeds represent him to the world. Don’t underestimate how helpful you can be to the world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What makes abstaining from sinful behavior difficult for believers? Mention some specific habits of abstinence Christians need to practice for the sake of their testimony today?
2. We live in an upside down world where evil is called good and good is called evil. In this kind of environment, what do you see endangering or threatening you and your family most?
3. The presence of lust reflects not so much the world as it does the condition of our own soul. How are you taking care of your soul to make it strong for the battle against evil desires? Heads of households, what are you doing to strengthen those in your family? Are you making use of all the resources the church offers for making you and your family strong for the battle?
4. In what areas of your life are you attempting to demonstrate goodness to those around you?
5. How are Christians, in general, spoken ill of in our society today? Have you experienced persecution for the sake of righteousness?