

## Living as a Christian Pilgrim in a Pagan World

One of the great challenges of the Christian life is maintaining a proper and biblical perspective as we walk through this world. Our world is an exceedingly troubled and wicked world. It is unloving. It is unjust. It is anti-Christ. The world in which we live actively opposes and rages against the LORD Jesus Christ, and those who belong to him.

As we walk through this world, it can be very easy to get overwhelmed, and distracted, not only with the difficulties of this life, but also with the delights that this world affords. The world, and the things in the world, can be very alluring, they can be very attractive, and they can very easily redirect our attention and our focus away from the LORD Jesus Christ.

This is why again and again the Scriptures warn Christians to be on the alert, and to live with a constant eye upon the future. We are to live with an eternal perspective. Paul repeatedly reminds us that if you have been raised up with Christ, then you must seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Christians must set their minds the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. The reason being, our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Thus, we are not to lose heart, nor are we to despair, nor are we to get bogged down in the trials and difficulties of this world. Even though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For the Christian, difficulty in life are but momentary light afflictions, which are preparing us for an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison. Therefore, we must not focus on the things that are seen, but on the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

In the midst of your daily walk through this world, in the midst of great corruption, political unrest, and social disruption, in the midst of personal suffering, where does your focus reside? Are you seeking the things that are above? Are you setting your mind on the things that are above? Or are you distracted and weighed down by the temporal things that are on earth? In your daily life, do you live in the reality that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven? Do you live in the reality that your true home is not of this world? Do you live in the reality that your inheritance, your reward, and your treasure, is in heaven, and that it, your treasure, along with you, are being kept and protected by the LORD God Almighty? If you are easily discouraged by your circumstances, or the state in which you find the world, you must realize that God has ordained all of these things. It is through these things, these dark and difficult things, that you are being prepared, for an eternal weight of glory, which is far beyond all comparison.

In my personal struggle to maintain a proper perspective in life, an eternal perspective, I have found John Bunyan's book *The Pilgrim's Progress* to be an extremely helpful resource. In the introduction of *Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan writes:

“All mankind are pilgrims; all are pressing through this world: the Christian willingly considers

that his life is a journey, because he is seeking a better country; but the greater multitude are anxious to prevent the recollection that time is a preparation for eternity, and, in consequence of this neglect, they shudder when approaching the brink of the grave, into which they are irresistibly plunged—time hurries on those whose pilgrimage is limited to the foul but fascinating streets of the ‘city of destruction;’ while those whose anxious cries lead them to the Christian calling, press on in the narrow and difficult path that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem.”

Bunyan likens our spiritual life to a long and difficult journey, through dangerous and perilous lands. The Christian pilgrim recognizes that this journey is preparing him for eternity. The Christian pilgrim recognizes that his goal should not be for a pleasant and comfortable journey, but the goal is to reach his final destination.

I often try to think about my life as spiritual journey, because to do so, reminds me that I am going somewhere. It reminds me that I need to keep focused, I need to keep my head up, and my attention on the path ahead, to look forward with anticipation to the joy of my arrival at my final destination. One day my faith will become sight, and I will see the LORD Jesus Christ face to face, and I will spend the rest of eternity exalting and worshipping Him.

Our passage this morning is 1 Peter 2:11-12, which addresses pilgrim living, or living as a Christian pilgrim in a dark and pagan world. In these two verses, Peter gives us three ways in which we are to live, as we make our journey through this world.

1 Peter 2:11-12, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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.

To live as a Christian pilgrim is to live with the proper mindset (v11), to abstain from the passions of the flesh (v11), and to maintain an honorable lifestyle (v12). As we journey through this world, we must live with the proper mindset, we must abstain from the passions of the flesh, and we must maintain an honorable lifestyle.

1 Peter 2:11, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

The first thing that a Christian pilgrims must do, is to live with the proper mindset. In v11, there are three terms that Peter uses to describe his readers: beloved, sojourners, and exiles.

Eight times in his writings, Peter uses the term, beloved, to describe believers. The Greek word translated “beloved” is *agapetos*, which describes someone who is sincerely and dearly loved. It describes someone who is greatly favored and highly esteemed. The idea conveyed in this term, is that believers are the objects of God’s vast and immeasurable love. Believers are loved by God, we are greatly loved by God—we are His beloved. All throughout the New Testament, the authors of Scripture continually remind us of our great value and worth in Christ Jesus, we are frequently reminded of who we are in Christ.

In Christ, we are the beloved: we are loved by God, we are held dear by God, we are highly esteemed, and highly favored by God. This is not because of any intrinsic value that we have brought to the table, we were entirely unlovable, and selfish, and prideful, and worthless. No one ever seeks after God. No one ever pursues God. Rather, we were haters of God, we resisted God, and we waged a violent war against Him.

Romans 5:8, But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:4-5, But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ –by grace you have been saved.

Christians are the beloved, we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but we have been made alive together with Christ. Never forget this remarkable truth, you are His beloved, and you are sincerely, and dearly, loved by the LORD God. God the Father has chosen you before the foundation of the world, to be predestined for adoption into the family God. You have been purchased out of the slave market of sin, and redeemed by God, being forgiven and reconciled according to the riches of his glorious grace. Those who have received the LORD Jesus Christ are undoubtedly his beloved, which is something that many of us often forget.

The next two terms that Peter uses to describe his readers are sojourners and exiles. These are a couple of terms that are not frequently used in today's vernacular. What is a sojourner? What is an exile? Sojourners and exiles are pilgrims. They are travelers, and wanderers. These terms describe someone who travels from a foreigner land and lives and resides temporarily amongst the citizens of that land. To the land in which they reside, sojourners and exiles, are strangers, they are aliens, they do not belong in the land, but are temporarily passing through.

Peter is again reminding us of our identity in Christ Jesus. If you identify with the LORD Christ Jesus, then you should not identify with this fallen world. If you belong to the LORD Jesus Christ, then you do not belong to the world, and thus you should be a stranger to this world, as a sojourner, as one who is just a passing through.

Philippians 3:20, But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The world in which we live is not our home. Our primary citizenship is not of this world, but of the next. Our citizenship is heaven, and the home that we seek is yet to come. The home that we seek is actually the destination of our journey.

As Christians, our status in this world should be as those who do not belong. As Christians, we are the ones who are out of place in this world. We are the pilgrims, we are the sojourners, we are the exiles that are temporarily traveling through this world in an effort to reach our final destination. We have been delivered us from this world, and transferred us to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. We have been raised us up with Christ, and seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And thus, our lives should reflect our blessed position.

As we journey through this world, these are the truths that must saturate our minds. These are the

truths that must be at the forefront of our thinking. These are the truths that must be our reality. In our walk through this world, our outlook, our perspective, and our mindset should be to live everyone of our days as an exile, as a sojourner, as one who is loved by God.

Practically speaking, what does this look like? In my everyday life, what do I need to do in order to live in this way? Once you have the proper mindset, the first manifestation of pilgrim living is godly living. To live as a pilgrim is to abstain from the passions of the flesh.

1 Peter 2:11, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

To the beloved, to the sojourner, and to the exile, Peter urges and exhorts them to abstain from the passions of the flesh. The term abstain, literally mean to hold away from, or to hold one's self off. To abstain means to refrain, to stay away, to steer clear, and to keep your distance from.

The phrase passions of the flesh refers to the strong cravings, the fleshly desires, the animal-like appetites, of our fallen sinful nature. It refers to every flavor and variation of evil and debauchery that all human beings have apart from the work of the Spirit of God in their lives.

Galatians 5:19-21, Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these (which makes the list of fleshly passions almost endless).

What is the origin of these fleshly passions? All of these sinful passions originate from the same place, our own sinful flesh.

James 1:13-15, Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is urged and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Later on, in this same book, James poses some questions. What is it that causes quarrels among you? What is it that causes fights among you? Is it not that your passions are at war within you?

God is not responsible for your sin. The Adversary is not responsible for your sin, the devil didn't make you do it. Your circumstances are not responsible for your sin. Your spouse is not responsible for your sin. Your children, your siblings, your relatives, your in-laws, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, your church family –none of these people are responsible for your sin. You are responsible for your sin, you are responsible for your actions. I am responsible for my sin, and you are responsible for your sin. Evil always lies close at hand, and temptation to sin always comes from the inside, from our own sinful desires, and it is these desires that give birth to sin.

This puts a very unique spin on the blame game does it not? Where does the buck stop? The buck stops here, with me. I am always responsible for my sin. Yes, there may be other contributing factors, but at the end of the day, God holds me accountable for my thoughts, my words, and my deeds. God holds me accountable for my actions. Far too often we blame someone else, or we blame something

else, for our own sin and failures. In doing this we trivialize sin, we minimize the egregious nature of sin, and we ignore its destructive nature.

Peter gives us a great reason for abstaining from the passions of the flesh. The passions of the your flesh actually wage war against your soul.

1 Peter 2:11, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

The passions of your flesh, are hostile towards your soul. The term soul simply refers to what is inside a person. God created man, and fashioned man into a living being, into a living soul, and our fleshly passions are at war against us. This war is not referring to a mere skirmish. This war is not referring to a one-time battle. This war is a long term military campaign, and this campaign is specific to you, and to your weaknesses and to your folly. This war is a constant and relentless assault that will never surrender all of the days of your sojourning. Matthew Henry comments:

“The grand mischief that sin does to man is this, it *wars against the soul*; it destroys the moral liberty of the soul; it weakens and debilitates the soul by impairing its faculties; it robs the soul of its comfort and peace; it debases and destroys the dignity of the soul, hinders its present prosperity, and plunges it into everlasting misery. Of all sorts of sin, none are more injurious to the soul than *fleshly lusts*. Carnal appetites, lewdness, and sensuality, are most odious to God, and destructive to man’s soul. It is a sore judgment to be given up to them.”

You cannot commit sin and fleshly acts, without them causing great injury to your soul. There are simply no safe sins. All sin is detrimental to your spiritual health. All sin comes with severe and dire consequences. Sin will leave deep wounds upon your soul, which is why Peter is urging us to abstain from them.

Easier said than done, isn’t it? How do we abstain from our fleshly passions? Earlier in the first chapter of 1 Peter, he writes:

1 Peter 1:14-15, As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

According to Peter, one way to abstain from sin is by not conforming to it. What does it mean do not be conformed? It means do not form according to a certain pattern or mold. It means do not fashion alike, or do not fit to the same outward pattern. It means that you will not mold or pattern your behavior with a particular pattern or a particular set of standards, in this case, the passions of the flesh. Christians are not to conform to the passions of our former ignorance. Christians are not to conform to the habits and practices that characterized our life prior to the saving grace of the LORD Jesus Christ. Christians are no longer to be fashioned by our selfish, sinful, and fleshly pursuits. Paul expresses the same truth in the book of Romans.

Romans 12:1-2, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Christian pilgrim is commanded not to conform to this world. Do not be conformed to your fleshly passions, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the image of Christ, by the renewal of your mind through the living and abiding word of God. In this war, the Christian pilgrim is not to surrender to fleshly desires, or to give them any foothold in their assault. The key to our spiritual victory is to walk by the Spirit God.

Galatians 5:16-17, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

To be victorious over sin, you must walk by the Spirit; you must be filled with the Spirit; you must follow the leading of the Spirit, and be controlled by the Holy Spirit, then, and then only, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

In every journey, you will eventually come to the crossroads, you will eventually come to an intersection, which is the point of decision. At this crossroad, a choice must be made as to what direction you will go. Will you move forward, will you go left, will you go right, or will you go back, and return from whence you came? As a Christian pilgrim, you will frequently find yourself at the crossroads. You will find yourself at an intersection, at the point of decision, and you will need to make a choice. Which choice will you choose? Which way will you go?

At work, your boss asks you to do something unethical. He asks you to lie for him. It is just a little white lie, no one will get hurt, and no one will ever find out the truth. You are at the point of decision. What will you do? Are you going to walk by the Spirit, or will you gratify the desires of the flesh?

At home, you have not left the house in over a week. Your children have the flu. The house is a mess, you are a mess. You are tired and you desperately need a nap. It is almost dinner time, so you muster up the strength to prepare a healthy dinner. Your husband comes home, he looks you up and down, he looks around at the house, and asks the question, "What have you been doing all day?" You are at the point of decision. What will you do? Are you going to walk by the Spirit, or will you gratify the desires of the flesh?

At home, it is late at night, there is nothing on television but your Internet browser is wide open. You are at the point of decision. What will you do? Are you going to walk by the Spirit or will you gratify the desires of the flesh?

At school, it is test day in math class and you are not prepared. This test will determine your final grade for the year. Your friend leans over and slides you a piece of paper with all the answers on it. You are at the point of decision. What will you do? Are you going to walk by the Spirit, or will you gratify the desires of the flesh?

Do you see how this works? Contrary to what many people suggest, walking by the Spirit is not a mystical experience. It is not a passive exercise of letting go and letting God. It is not merely waiting on the Holy Spirit, rather, it is active submission to the Holy Spirit.

As you abstain from fleshly passions, and as you submit and yield to the Holy Spirit, you will conform, not to your fleshly passions, but to the image of Christ. Step by step, from one degree of glory to another, the Holy Spirit will move you from where we are, to where God wants you to be. And while it is the Spirit who is the source of all holy living, it is you, the believer, who is commanded to fight against sin and temptation.

Philippians 2:12-13, Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The power to abstain from the passions of the flesh comes from the Holy Spirit. It is God who is at work in you, but the responsibility to abstain from the passions of the flesh falls to you. It falls to me. I must work out my salvation. I must impart maximum effort in my fight against sin, recognizing that I am only able to do this because it is God who at work in me.

To live as a Christian pilgrim is to live with the proper mindset, you are loved by God, you are a sojourner, you are an exile, are your gaze must be firmly fixed upon the LORD Jesus Christ. To live as a Christian pilgrim is to abstain from the passions of the flesh. These fleshly passions are alluring, but they are not friendly. These fleshly passions will do considerable damage to your soul. So, you must abstain from these passions, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, looking to, and relying upon the Spirit of God.

Lastly, to live as a pilgrim is to maintain an honorable lifestyle.

1 Peter 2:12, 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.

As a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, as a sojourner and exile who is traveling through this world, as one who bears the name of Christ, who represents the true King of kings, and LORD of Lord's, your conduct among the Gentiles must be honorable. The change that has occurred in your inner man, must be visible in your outer man. The inner transformation of your heart, should be manifest into every external area of your life. The work of God in our lives, must be clearly demonstrated by our outward conduct and behavior. Simon Kistemaker remarked:

“Christians are living in glass houses; they are on display. Their conduct, deeds, and words are evaluated constantly by non-Christians who want to see if Christians indeed live up to what they profess.”

The world is watching. The world is watching you. The world is watching me. Before their eyes, our lives ought to be honorable and pleasing to the LORD God. The Greek term translated honorable speaks of something that is beautiful, winsome, attractive, surpassing, commendable, or noble. It

speaks of something that is excellent, something that is good in the purest and highest sense. Is your life honorable amongst the unbelieving world? Is your life beautiful? Is it commendable? Is it excellent? One commentator put it like this:

“It is timeless truth. Whether we like it or not, every Christian is an advertisement for Christianity; by his life he either commends it to others or makes them think less of it. The strongest missionary force in the world is a Christian life.”

Think about this statement for a moment. Is this right? Is the strongest missionary force in the world a Christian life? Is the strongest missionary force in the world your Christian life? Is it my Christian life? It ought to be. The people whom we encounter in our everyday lives should be able to see consistent honorable behavior in our lives. If you are to be an effective witness for the LORD Jesus Christ, then it is absolutely essential that you manifest right conduct and right behavior, striving to be honorable, striving to be exemplary, and striving to be above reproach in every area of your lives.

I don't recall where I heard this but it has always stuck with me:

“We are the Bibles that the world is reading. We are the truths that the world is needing. We are the sermons that the world is heeding.”

If you call yourself a Christian, then your life had better reflect it.

There is another reason why we are to live honorable lives amongst the Gentiles. There is another reason why honorable living is so essential to evangelism and the proclamation of the Gospel.

1 Peter 2:12, 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.

Living an honorable life will close the mouths of your critics. Living an honorable life will turn the tables on them. In the things that they speak against you, in their attempts to dishonor, discredit, and disgrace you, you will prove them wrong. At some point in life, if you are a true believer, you will be spoken against as an evildoer. If you are a true believer, then you will be persecuted. If the LORD Jesus Christ was persecuted, then the followers of the LORD Jesus Christ will be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3:12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

1 Peter 2:21, For to this you have been called [speaking of suffering and persecution], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

True believers will experience persecution. This has been the case throughout the history of the church. Early Christians were falsely accused of all kinds of crazy things: rebellion against the government & terrorism, atheism, cannibalism, gross immorality, damaging trade, hindering social progress, and leading slaves into insurrection and rebellion.

Expect accusations, expect persecution, expect suffering. The cross must precede the crown. The Christian pilgrim is to refute all such slander and false accusations by living an honorable life, by living a respectful life, by living a life full of good deeds. Our witness and our defense should come from our



walk. There should be nothing in our conduct that will give our enemies ammunition to attack the LORD Jesus Christ, to attack the Gospel, or to attack the church. Our good works must back up our good words. This is clearly the idea that the LORD Jesus Christ was proclaiming in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:14-16, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. To what does the day of visitation refer? In the Old Testament God visited man in a number of ways, but primarily for two reasons; blessing or judgment. God visited them to bless and God visited them to judge. In the New Testament the day of visitation typically refers to the day of salvation, the day of redemption. It refers to the LORD God visiting lost sinners and saving them by his great grace.

Peter is saying that because of the ongoing observation of the character and quality of a true Christian's life, many unbelievers, unbelievers who may have spoken evil against you, will glorify the LORD God in the day when salvation visits them. Peter is exhorting believers to live honorable lives because in doing so, unbelievers will see their good works, and because of these good works, some unbelievers will repent and believe and give glory to God on the day of visitation. In the world, many will accuse, revile, and slander, but as they notice our honorable and excellent lives, some will repent and be saved, and as a result of their salvation, God will be glorified.

To live as a pilgrim is to live with the proper mindset (an eternal perspective). To live as a pilgrim is to abstain from the passions of the flesh. To live as a pilgrim is to maintain an honorable lifestyle.

The great American pastor/theologian Jonathan Edwards writes:

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature; and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance.... Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives; to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for, or set our hearts on, any thing else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?

The LORD God is calling you to a radical way of life, the pilgrim life. As you journey through this world, do not hold on to the things of the world too tightly, hold them loosely. Always remember that you are not of this world. Do not let anything divert your attention from the goal. Do not let anything distract you from reaching your final destination. Live with the proper mindset, abstain from the passions of the flesh, and maintain an honorable lifestyle, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. You have been