

(1 Peter - Part 21): As Strangers & Pilgrims, Abstain From Fleshly Lusts

by A.W. Tozer

As Christians, we are strangers and pilgrims in this world, and we must abstain from fleshly lusts that war against our soul in order to live a life of inner purity and humility.

Duration: 18:33

Scripture: Genesis 19:1, Exodus 2:22, Psalm 84:5, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11

Topics: "Pilgrims"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that as Christians, we are pilgrims journeying home and our only real enemies are within us. God has changed the external world and protected his anointed ones, but we still face temptations that can destroy our souls. The preacher gives an example of two Christians, one who gets involved in worldly things and loses their character as a stranger, while the other remains separated from the ways of the world. The sermon also highlights the importance of Christians being both strangers and pilgrims, abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. The preacher references Bible verses, such as 1 Peter 2:11, to support these teachings.

Transcript

2nd chapter of Peter, 1st Peter, 2nd chapter, verse 11. Dearly Beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. That is rather a complete sentence in itself, a period could be placed there, and you have a very strong and full statement.

There is only a semicolon in our King James Version, and we go on from there, though we will not have time for it this morning. So we will put a period there. Dearly Beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Now, Peter was an apostle, and according to some, first pope. He therefore had every authority that God ever gave, I suppose, to any man on earth. Greater authority than that enjoyed by Moses, in that it was broader.

And yet he did not command these Christians scattered abroad, but besought them and called them by a tender term of affection. Dearly Beloved, he said, I beseech you. The reason is that there are certain moral acts which cannot be secured by commandments.

Certain other ones can. It is altogether possible to command, Thou shalt not kill. Because the act of murder can be restrained, and if we do not kill another, then we have fulfilled a commandment, and the human life has been saved.

But there are certain other acts which must be voluntary if they are to be real, because willingness is a part of their moral content. So that threats and force cannot work to secure these acts. If Peter had said, I command you that you walk as pilgrims and strangers and avoid fleshly lusts, he would have been commanding an impossibility.

Because to know the character of a pilgrim and a stranger, and to live before God in meek humility and purity, which overrides the desires of the flesh, is something that can only be achieved by a spiritual willingness. Therefore it cannot be commanded. I hope that what I am saying is plain to you.

Not that you couldn't get it, but that I think I'm confusing it somewhat. Let me illustrate it like this. A man can come home from his work, a brutal, coarse man, and walk up to his wife, and with an angry face, threaten her, and say, What's the reason? Dinner is not on the table.

And command her to get his dinner. And she's afraid of him, and she knows he does have some kind of legal hold on her, so she hurries off and hurries up to dinner. He gets his dinner by commandment, but he cannot walk up to that same woman and say, I command you, love me.

He cannot get love by commandment, because willingness and inward participation of a voluntary kind are necessary to love, but not necessarily to the obedience to a commandment. So that the man of God did not say, I command you, he said, I beseech you, dearly beloved. And Paul was saying, though Paul as an apostle of Christ had every right to command, he knew there were some things you never could get by commanding them.

So he said, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you give your bodies wholly acceptable unto God. Because the nature of this consecration was such that they had to do it willingly and without fear of reprisal or sanctum, or they could not have done it at all. Now he said, O dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims.

Last week we saw, and I made a good deal out of it, that if we know what we are, then we can trust God to live in character with what we are. And he says, you Christians are strangers on earth. And the word stranger, of course, is sojourner.

Usually it refers to someone temporarily living in a foreign country, not at home there and not intending to be. And separated from the natives by language and dress and customs and conduct, and usually by culture, varying culture. And this is a stranger, a person from a foreign country who isn't at home where he is and isn't going to settle down and be at home there, but is temporarily in that country, separated by language, so he speaks with an accent, separated by dress and custom and conduct and diet and culture.

This makes the stranger. American doesn't know too many strangers, we absorb them too fast. We melt them up so fast that we hardly remember who they are.

As soon as they get over their first original thick accent, they're American. But the Bible here recognizes sojourners in a land for only there for a time, something as the men that are here with the United Nations are in New York City or wherever they are there, living near about New York City and in New York City. They're only here temporarily and they don't intend to stay, and they're not taking out naturalization

papers, they're sojourners, they're here for a time.

Separated by language and customs and conduct and past and tradition and memories and all the rest. Now, just as soon as a man ceases thus to be separated from those around him, he's a stranger no more. But Peter never recognized our becoming naturalized or getting over our character as strangers, as Christians were strangers on earth.

Abraham and Lot are outstanding examples of how men can be strangers and then cease to be strangers. Abraham and Lot came from Ur of the Chaldees and entered into the land of Palestine. One day their herdsmen quarreled and they got together like two relatives should, talked it over and decided they'd better separate.

They were too big to go together anymore and there was bad blood between their servants. So Abraham said, you look it over, go the way you want to go and I'll take what's left. Noble old unselfish man that he was.

Lot looked toward the plains of Jordan and moved down that direction. Abraham stayed on the plains of Mamre where there was some grass but not too much. The other man went where the grass was green and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

It wasn't long until he sat in the gate of Sodom, which is equivalent to saying that if he was not the mayor of the city, at least he was high up in official position, because they had their offices in the gate of the city, as we have it in the city hall now. One day Keter Lamer and some other kings came along and they made an assault upon the city, and they captured the city, and humorously enough they captured Lot in his whole outfit. Somebody that escaped knew that help had to come from somewhere, and you know where they looked? They said, we'll go tell Abraham the Hebrew, and the word Hebrew means the stranger.

The only man capable of helping in that crisis was the man who had never committed himself or got involved. He was separated from them and could help them from the outside. So they sent for Abraham, not Lot.

Lot was already handcuffed and tied up and hamstrung like a hog taken to market. Big Lot who had sat in the gate was now lying in the back end of a wagon and was being carried away like so much hamburger. And they had to send for the man Abraham the stranger.

Abraham, who had kept himself free from Sodom and all of its people, got his little army together and went out and whipped the daylights out of Keter Lamer and his crowd and rescued Lot and his people. There is an example. Two Christians start out together, and one of them gets involved in the things of this world.

He loses his character as a stranger. He may rise to a place where he sits in the gate, but he loses something that the other man has. The other man withdraws and keeps himself separated as far as possible from the ways of the world and lives a separated life of a stranger.

And then trouble comes. Someone down the street gets in a jam. Which one do they send for? Lot? No, he is in as much trouble as the rest.

They always send for Abraham. They always send for the man who has been separated and kept separated. Lecture 11 Justification and Sanctification 3 Now, he said, not only are you Christian strangers, but you Christians are pilgrims as well as strangers.

And a pilgrim is a stranger on his way from one place to another, one passing through en route. Always remember that, that a Christian is en route. He isn't where he started and he isn't where he is going.

He is only where he has gotten to. Sometimes men will come through this city and their phone will ring and somebody will say, This is so-and-so. Either I'll know him or I won't know him.

He will introduce himself or else some friend I know, usually preachers, writers or something, and I'll say, Oh, are you visiting Chicago? No, just on my way through from Detroit or Cleveland or somewhere else. And on my way to Omaha or Denver or on west, he is just en route, he has his ticket in his pocket, and he stopped to speak to a friend on his way through. Now, there is the character of a pilgrim.

That's what it means, somebody en route, somebody passing through. And this is the Christian concept of things. Heaven is our fatherland toward which we are journeying, and earth is a wilderness.

I know how they ride us Christians for our concept of the world as being a veil of tears. I have read some very caustic criticisms of that Christian concept, that this is a veil of tears. They say, What kind of gloomy old crows are you sitting around croaking about this veil of tears? That's the Christian concept, take it or leave it.

It's a world in which we live because of sin, the temporary visitation that sin has made. It is a wilderness through which we journey. We may rest a while, but only for a night, and then we pitch our tent a day's march nearer home.

But we're never to settle here, and we're never to become naturalized. If you wanted to do it and had time to bother with it, it would help you, as it has helped me, to just run through the hymn books and see how this idea of Christians being strangers, particularly strangers on their way, runs through all the Bibles, the New Testament particularly. Let me quote here just a brief excerpt from great hymns.

Joseph of the Stadium wrote in the 800's of this era, and he starts out one of his great hymns, O happy band of pilgrims, if onward ye will tread, there we have it. We come on down to the famous Montcell, and he has one stanza, on our way rejoicing homeward as we move with Jesus as our leader, to Jesus as our head. Everybody remembers the famous Welsh song, guide me O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.

Seneca wrote, we are traveling unto God in the way our fathers trod, they are happy now, and we soon their happiness shall see. Dinsendorf, Jesus still lead on till our rest be won, and although the way be cheerless, we will follow calm and fearless, guide us by thy hand to our fatherland. And Shmoke, straight to my home above I travel calmly on, and singing life or death, my Lord thy will be done.

That's just a few, you can find them by the dozens that conceive their earth to be a wilderness through which the Christian pilgrim travels on his way to the fatherland. But he is not alone in that always unseen there walks by his side and within him the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He may have to stop and pitch his tent overnight, he may have to assume the character of a soldier and fight his way through, but always he is on route.

Lastly, while you are doing this, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. These fleshly lusts are those natural appetites that have their seat in the body and the mind. And these natural appetites would be innocent except for sin, but now are enemies of the soul.

Nobody needs, and here is one of those instances where you cannot command anybody, you can only beseech them as pilgrims and strangers. But we may be sure of this, that anyone who is going to make his journey safely and successfully will have to keep himself free from those fleshly lusts that war against the soul. If we do not, we will be slowed down or stopped in our practice.

The inner life must overcome them, or they will overcome and destroy the inner life. It's a strange thing, it's a deplorable thing, but it's true when you've got to face it, that one part of us fights against another part of us, that the lower nature fights against the higher nature, that the flesh fights against the spirit, and that the fleshly lusts war against our souls. Thomas Akemba said, Peace will always be found not in indulging our lower appetite, but in resisting them.

And a mere philosopher, who was no Christian at all, probably, but a great thinker, said this, Every victory we win over the flesh, however slight, will prove to be a strengthening act to our soul. That was Emerson. So now that's all for this morning, except to point out this singular truth, that we are pilgrims journeying home, and that the only real enemies, the only dangerous enemies, are within us.

God has changed the land on the outside. God has said to Satan, This far and no farther. God has spoken to the very armies of the world, and has forbade them to touch his anointed, to do his prophet any harm.

We have within us temptations which he fielded to destroy our soul. So says the Holy Ghost, I beseech you, the strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

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