

FIRST PETER

Lesson 10

Duties of Aliens and Strangers

1 Peter 2:9-12

Do we clearly understand, Christians, that we are aliens and strangers to planet earth? Because we have been chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and caused to be born again by the Holy Spirit, we belong to God, and our destiny is heaven. We are pilgrims, strangers and aliens to this world. We will never feel totally comfortable while we inhabit any part of the globe because God has programmed us to long for our Heavenly home.

Yet, as aliens and strangers, God does have a purpose for us as we move on in our journey through life, anxiously awaiting the new heavens and new earth. Our purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We glorify God in multitudes of ways, but here in 1 Peter 2:9-12, we see that we have five primary duties which we are to do while on this earth: (1) we are to understand our position in Christ, (2) we are to tell a lost world about Christ, (3) we are to revel in the fact that we are God's people, (4) we are to live separated lives unto God and away from sin, and (5) we are to practice good works.

DISCERNING OUR POSITION (2:9a)

“But you are a CHOSEN RACE”

The “but” speaks of a contrast to the rejectors in 1 Peter 2:8, for it says, *“for they (unbelievers) stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were appointed.”* There are, however, acceptors of Christ, and their blessings are contrasted with the doom of rejectors of Christ.

Peter declares that believers in Christ in the New Testament, who make up the universal Church, are “a chosen race.” This is a quote from the Old Testament (Isa. 43:10, 20 cf. Deut. 7:6-7; Isa. 44:1-2). Peter here applies truths about Israel in the Old Testament to the Church.

Israel in the Old Testament is distinct from the Church in the New Testament, but they have many things in common. God made promises to physical Israel in the Old Testament, but when the nation of Israel rejected Messiah, God began to build His Church, which is spiritual Israel. God, however, still has a plan for physical, unbelieving Israel which will come about at or around the Second Advent of Christ.

Notice that Peter calls these Christians “a chosen race” which is a quote from Isaiah 43:10, 20. Christians have been sovereignly chosen by God to salvation and each one has received the new birth from God. Therefore, Christians are a spiritual, supernatural race with a common life, the life of Jesus Christ. Christians form the Church which is God's family, and this family is distinct from the unsaved world by divine choice. The chosen race is made up of all true believers in Christ whether Methodist, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics and even Independents. Every member of the true Church has eternal life flowing through the body.

“A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD”

This is a quote from Exodus 19:5-6. Christians in the dispensation of the Church are not only a body of priests but they are royal priests, kingly priests or regal priests with all the power, dignity and poise that image evokes.

A Christian, as a royal priest, has the right to approach God directly. No one is to speak for him, or come between him and God, except Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest and Mediator. Every regal priest must offer spiritual sacrifices or he is not a priest. Christians do not offer up bloody animal sacrifices but spiritual sacrifices.

“Through Him (Christ) then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16)

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

Each Christian offers up praise, performance, purse and person, and it is with these sacrifices that God is well pleased, for this is true biblical worship.

“A HOLY NATION”

This is a quote from Exodus 19:6. “Nation” refers to a multitude of people of the same nature. “Holy” means “to set apart” or “to consecrate.” Christians form a spiritual nation of people set apart to God.

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Israel) and be given to a nation (Church) producing the fruit of it” (Matt 21:43).

Christians are in every physical nation on earth and spiritually they now form a distinct, holy, superior nation. The universal Church is a supernatural people because it was brought into existence by supernatural acts of God. Because Christians are a supernatural people belonging to God, they are pilgrims and strangers among the earthly nations.

The universal Church of Christ is also supra-national. It transcends all political, economic, military and cultural differences. The Church has a King to rule over them, Jesus Christ. It has laws to govern them, the Bible. It has a national purpose—to glorify God. It also has a national anthem, “Saved, saved by the blood of the Lamb.”

“A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION”

This is a loose quote from Exodus 19:5. The Church is a people of God’s own possession. This literally means “to put a circle around to indicate ownership.” There is a unique, private and personal ownership of every Christian by God. Each saint is God’s unique possession just as if that Christian were the only human in existence. Christians are

the people of God's acquisition, choice, care and delight. The universal Church is a living organism, not an organization or an institution.

Richard Halverson, retired pastor of The Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C., said,

*Man builds institutions—God is growing a body.
 Institutions are temporal—The body is eternal!
 Institutions divide and alienate—The body unites!
 Institutions glorify man—The body glorifies God!
 Institutions are monuments to man's achievements—The body is a witness
 to God's grace!
 Institutions are manipulated by man—The body is administered by God!
 As history comes to its consummation all institutions will be destroyed—
 The body will live forever!
 The big question—where is my priority—is it what man is doing—or what
 God is doing?*

DECIMINATING THE GOSPEL (2:9b)

“a definite purpose”

The ultimate purpose of being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people of God's own possession is that every Christian might be a witness by lips and life to a lost world, telling them about our Heavenly Father who saved us through Christ Jesus. This is a testimony with our lips.

The word “proclaim” means “to tell out, to publish completely, to proclaim abroad, to advertise.” We Christians are to advertise everywhere about the God who saved us in Christ Jesus the Lord. We are to tell men of the excellencies (virtues, eminent qualities) of God the Father. We Christians are to publish abroad about this God who sovereignly and efficaciously called us as sinners out of darkness into His marvelous light of salvation. Christians are saved to sound forth the good news to all.

Real witnessing is telling others about the excellencies of God the Father, and sharing with others what God has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is telling others what God has done for us and what He is like. Witnessing is sharing with others our experience of salvation with Christ. Witnessing is not necessarily putting pressure on people to make a decision for Christ.

When we witness to others of God's grace in our lives, we offer up a spiritual sacrifice to God that is like a sweet smelling offering and a savor of worship to Him. Notice once again that witnessing is proclaiming, telling, advertising; therefore, it involves opening our mouths wide for Christ.

The Christian is to be a witness to friends, family, neighbors and associates. We must begin our evangelism at home, our Jerusalem, for the Lord said, “*You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even unto the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

But we do not stop at home. We must have a vision for the whole world. We must become world Christians in our thinking. Our Lord said in Acts 1:8, “*You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even unto the remotest*

part of the earth.” It is not an either/or situation; it is a both/and situation. There must be world evangelism and we must commit to reaching a lost world for Christ.

DELIGHTING IN BEING THE PEOPLE OF GOD (2:10)

“for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE (A) PEOPLE OF GOD”

This once again is a loose quotation from Hosea 1:6; 2:23. Peter was writing to both Jews and Gentiles who were now converted to Christ, forming the Church. Before coming to Christ, the Jews were lost and only part of the external community of God; yet, they were not true believers because they rejected the Messiah, even though they had the covenants and Jewish privileges. The Jews were the people of God only in an external sense, except for that very small remnant who truly believed in the Messiah to come. When Jews in the Old Testament believed in the Messiah, they became a people of God in an internal, redeeming sense.

Gentiles, before they came to Christ, were no people of God at all, for they were strangers to the covenants, being lost in sin and paganism. The phrase “now you are the people of God” should be translated “now you are a people of God.” The converted Jews and Gentiles to Christ formed the Church, which is a people of God in the New Covenant. Israel, in the Old Testament, was also a “people of God.”

While the Church is spiritual Israel, fulfilling in a spiritual way the covenants given to Israel, the Church is not fulfilling the promises of the covenants in the Old Testament to physical Jews.

“you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”

This again is a quote from Hosea 1:9. These Jews and Gentiles had not been the objects of God’s grace because God chose them, called them, and showed them mercy by a sovereign act. They deserved nothing. All they had was because of God’s pure mercy and grace.

DISCIPLINING THE LIFE (2:11)

“Beloved. . .”

Christians are accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6) ; therefore, they are beloved ones of God. There is nothing more exhilarating and exciting than to realize that we are objects of God’s saving love.

“I urge you”

This is a strong plea with a push.

“as aliens and strangers”

An “alien” refers to a people who do not possess legal rights of citizens and is very closely connected to our English thought of “foreigners.” It is a person who has made his home away from home and along side of people foreign to him.

The word “strangers” or “exiles” is very near our English word “transients.” A transient is someone who has no permanent place of residence; yet, he lives among strangers but does not belong to those he lives among.

These Asian Christians lived among the unsaved but they were aliens and strangers to the world because they were part of a great spiritual nation chosen by God for salvation. Peter is stressing to these Asian Christians the temporary nature of human life, for he wanted them to realize that they have a very temporary and short-lived stay on this planet earth. They were just travelers passing through this life on a journey to get to their eternal inheritance in heaven.

As the old gospel singer sang, “This world is not our home, we’re just passing through. Our treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

Christians are not only citizens of this world which is fleeting and temporary, but they are, more importantly, citizens of heaven. “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 3:20).

As Christians we have no permanent legal status in the here and now. We can put up with unjust sufferings as Christians because we know we are heaven bound where our citizenship is permanent.

This verse has some very practical implications: (1) Christians should not think of this world as their home, (2) Christians should not seek to store up great amounts of possessions as if they were going to remain on this earth forever, (3) Christians should not get attached to people or things so deeply that this will impede their journey to heaven, (4) while Christians must have earthly pursuits, their thoughts and affections should be on heavenly things, and (5) Christians are to consciously work at detaching themselves from the pulls of the world and the flesh, for it is impossible to make much progress on a journey if one is encumbered with the things of this world.

“to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

This is a negative exhortation. Because a Christian has a testimony to maintain among the unsaved (Pet. 2:9), he is to abstain from feeding the desires of the flesh. “To abstain” means “to hold oneself back” which seems to indicate that the Christian, through the Holy Spirit, now has the power to abstain from these lusts.

The “lusts” are really “fleshly passions” which includes more than just sexual lusts. This refers to any strong passion that may arise from the body or soul (mind, emotion and will). It refers not only to selfish and indulgent natural appetites, but also to sins like hatred, idolatry, envy, conceit, greed, slander and a thousand other sins that would keep the Christian from making progress in the journey to heaven.

These “fleshly lusts” constantly war or campaign against the regenerate soul. Yes, the remaining sin in us, the flesh, is carrying out a massive war inside of the Christian to get him to lose his testimony before the world (Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:16-17).

Conflict with sin is normal and when the flesh in us wars, we must strike back to put it to death by the power of the Holy Spirit. It takes discipline of the life to wage war against sin. It is impossible for a Christian soldier to win the war against sin without a

strict discipline of one's personal life. Remember, Christian, in our struggle with sin, we will lose some battles but by the grace of God we will win the war.

DOING GOOD WORKS (2:1-2)

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.”

Christians are to constantly have a good conduct or manner of life as a testimony to the unsaved (Gentiles). This is a positive exhortation. The word “excellent” means “a goodness which is beautiful” or “an outer goodness that strikes the eye.” Peter is saying to these Asian Christians, “in the face of opposition and unjust treatment, be winsome, be beautiful. Let the graciousness of our Lord display itself in your life.”

A good life is the best defense a Christian has against those who speak evilly of him.

“so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers”

When these Asian Christians were saved, they turned away from pagan Gentile religions and licentious living. Consequently, they were distrusted by the Gentile unbelievers and the Roman government. Christians were called “evil doers” which means “bad actors” or “good-for-nothings.”

The early Christians were unjustly accused of murder, human sacrifice, incest—every gross and immoral act—because there was such a bond of love between them and they claimed to be partaking of the blood and body of Christ by faith at the Lord's Table. They were treated unjustly and falsely accused. *“But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22).*

Surely the early believers were called extremists and wild-eyed fanatics because they did not go along with the status quo. The tendency on the part of these Christians would be to react defensively and get resentful and rebellious, displaying an ugly spirit. Christians were blamed for everything that happened in the Roman Empire. Tertullian, a church Father, said,

“If the Tiber rises to the walls of the city, if the Nile does not irrigate the fields, if an earthquake takes place, if famine or the pestilence arise, they cry forth: ‘Away with the Christians to the lions!’”

Let's make this a little more practical. Suppose your neighbors thought you attended church in order to participate in a murderous, incestuous, drunken orgy. When you returned home after church, the people would stare at you out of their windows; they would avoid you; their children would have nothing to do with your children. If they believed things about you that were not true, how would you react? Would you get defensive? Would you let a root of bitterness spring up in your heart? What would be the Christian thing to do? The next part of this verse gives us the answer.

“they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them . . .”

Peter tells these Asian Christians not to react negatively to slander, false accusations and lies, but to do good works. It was through the good works of these Asian Christians that the unsaved world would sit up and take notice of the Christian faith and gain a desire to know the person of Jesus Christ.

The word “observe” means “to watch over a long period of time” and is equivalent to the English word “scrutinize.” These unsaved Gentiles looked for a long time at the lives of the Christians and they finally concluded that their faith in Jesus Christ was genuine, living and personal, and they began to show an interest in this amazing Christ.

Eusebius, an early church historian, tells us that within a few years the positive actions of the Christians overturned the unfair charges. Eusebius said,

“The slanderous accusations which had been brought against the whole church also vanished, and there remained our teaching alone, which prevailed over all ... so that not one of them now ventures to affix a base calumny upon our faith, or any such slander as our ancient enemies formerly delighted to utter.”

Persecution of Christians went on, not because of false accusations, but because Christians would not say that Caesar was Lord. However, the false charges against Christians were overthrown. How did this come about? They heeded the Apostle Peter’s exhortation. They lived in such a positive way that no one could believe them guilty of those perversities.

Let’s face it, Christians, our good works have a strong missionary impact. *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16)*. When slander, accusations and lies come against us, we should try to defend our position as best we can, even as the early Church did by writing tracts to emperors. But, having done that, if we are still misunderstood, then we must accept it. We should not get defensive, or bitter or develop an ugly spirit about it. We must let God defend us. Our task is to kill our enemies with kindness and good works.

“glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Some think that “the day of visitation” refers to the Second Advent of Christ when He will judge the Christians at the Judgment Seat. There will be Christians at the Judgment Seat because others stood true to Christ and won them to Him.

However, it is my opinion that “the day of visitation” refers to the day of salvation which comes to a rebellious sinner. The word “visitation” literally means “overseeing.” God becomes the overseer of the life when He takes mercy on a soul and a person is saved.

Let’s not miss the point. It is as the unsaved see our good works that they get interested in Christ and begin to seek after Him. Remember, the only Bible that most of the lost world will ever read is our lives. The Christ they see and grasp will be the Christ they see in us. Yet, if we will shine as lights and display good works, some people will take an interest in Christ and will be visited by God so as to receive salvation.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you know something about Christ and even admire and respect people who are Christians, but you are not yet a Christian yourself. You may be afraid to take that leap of faith into Christ. May I urge you to come to Him by faith with all your fears, doubts and sins. Christ receives sinners, not perfect people. Anyone who comes to Christ in simple faith is accepted by Him with no strings attached.

The Bible says, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" I urge you to taste Christ by faith and see that He is good. You will sense and feel His love, mercy and grace, for you will become a forgiven sinner in Christ. Then God will work in your heart so that you will begin to understand you are an alien and a stranger to this world. You will begin then to realize that you are a pilgrim on a journey to a heavenly country.