

*11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

We've been studying 1 Peter together for several weeks, and Peter has taken some pains to carefully tell us who we are. In chapter 1:1 all the way through chapter 2:10 he has laid out our identity. This is who you are.

And in verses 9 and 10, like a great fourth of July fireworks display, when you get to the end of the program you have a huge volley that fills the sky, the grand finale, vss 9 and 10 are Peter's grand finale of this section of our identity.

*9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.*

We spent a couple of weeks in there and if you missed that section, I would urge you to go to the website and read through those. It's rich, because we are in fact gloriously wealthy . . . in Christ.

Peter's writings are harder to outline than Paul's. He doesn't organize his arguments and then attack in an orderly fashion from beginning to end, logic building on logic like Paul does.

But very much like Paul, in this beginning section, Peter has outlined, this is who you are, this is your identity. And then having laid that foundation, Peter is going to spend some time saying, this is how you live.

This is who we are. This is how we live.

We saw that we are distinctive from the world. Our salvation has made us citizens of another realm. We are sojourners here. Foreigners traveling through a land that isn't ours. Our home is in heaven. And that is the beginning basis for Peter's exhortation this morning.

Because distinctiveness causes offense. Distinctiveness from the surrounding world causes an offense to the world. And so we go into this section with the question; Is the church in America distinctive enough that the world is offended? And if not, why not?

Because without that idea, Peter's argument doesn't work. It doesn't make any sense. So, let's look at Peter's words to us.

*11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*

He begins with a word of endearment. Beloved. Like a father who loves his children and urges them to make choices for their ultimate benefit. A father disciplines his children and either gives or sometimes restricts good things from his children, but always the bottom line is love and thriving.

Peter begins there. I love you, therefore, consider carefully my exhortation. It's for your best. I love you and I want you to thrive; therefore . .

And then he falls back on what he has just taught them about who they are. You are aliens and strangers in this world. Living in, but separate from; That is the basis for how I'm asking you to respond.

I urge you as aliens and strangers who have left this world behind. Therefore, don't participate in what this world does. As aliens and strangers we don't participate in this world's norms. We are fish out of water in this world. Great speckled birds.

Them and us. Separate. In Philippians 3:19 - 20 Paul agrees with Peter as he speaks of the citizens of this world; 19 *Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds*

*are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Alien is normative. Stranger is normative. Are we hermits then? Do we go build a Benedictine monastery with a high wall and a moat to keep the world out?

No. He's talking on a spiritual level. We are to be statesmen, like Daniel. In the world, but not "of" it. Bringing excellence to the world, but separated from it.

The word *alien* is of interest. Originally it meant "live alongside the house". Like alien residents that are in the news so often these days. Forced out of their own country, they live in a country not their own, alongside the residents there. We live and work alongside the residents of this world, but our citizenship is in heaven.

*Strangers* is an interchangeable world. The author of Hebrews explains what a stranger is; 13:14 *For here we do not have a permanent city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.* And indeed, in chapter 11 of that same book, the faith hall of fame, he finishes with these words. 38 *(men of whom the world was not worthy)*

They were aliens and strangers in this world, and in fact this world wasn't worthy to own them. God did that.

OK, back to work. Based on who we are, Peter as a loving spiritual father, urges us to live like who we are.

*11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*

Fleshly lusts is more than the obvious first things that come into our minds. Physical desires that are not allowed by our new King. They ***are that*** but also so much more. Rather, fleshly lusts is inclusive of everything in this world that we are in the process of walking away from.

Paul expresses the idea so well to the Corinthians when he says; 3:3 *for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

In this case, arguing and fighting with each other, but the idea I'm honing in on is mere men. Mere men being ordinary unregenerated men. Men of this realm. When we fall back into any of the patterns of unregenerate people, we are fleshly. Not changed. Not distinct.

Instead of defaulting to obvious physical things that God does not allow, Peter is speaking of something far broader. Fleshly lusts that wage war against the soul was the norm before we were saved. There was no war. We simply engaged.

Consider Paul's list to the Galatians. Actually we need to consider Paul's entire parallel passage to the Galatians because the intent is identical to Peter's intent here; Turn with me to Galatians 5

*16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, (those are the ones that immediately came to our minds when Peter started to talk about lusts waging war, but those are just the beginning.)*

*20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Peter compacts into a few words exactly what Paul carefully delineates to the Galatians here. Living by the Spirit looks like this. Living

according to the flesh looks like this. There is a war going on inside you, and you don't get to do the things the old you would very much still like to do.

Well, why wouldn't I?? Because you are aliens and strangers. Because Christ is in you and has removed you from this world and made you new, of course. But the war inside is real.

Al Mohler in one of his Open Line Friday programs where he fields any kind of question that anyone wants to ask dealt with this question. What is the difference between soul and spirit?

And I'm going to answer slightly different than he did. I believe the difference between soul and spirit is where this war takes place.

When my spirit was dead, there was no war. But when Christ Jesus quickened my spirit from the dead, and made it alive together with Him, all of a sudden a war broke out. Inside me! A war is being waged between my soul and my spirit. My old dead self that wants old dead things, and my new self.

My old man wants all the same things it always did. John in his epistles breaks Paul's long list to the Galatians down this way. The lust of the eyes. The lust of the flesh. And the boastful pride of life.

My eyes want things that I can't have. My flesh wants things that it can't have. And I want to be a rock star. I want the world to bow down before me. I want to be the next big winner on America's Got Talent. I want a golden statue to put on my mantle. I want my name to be a household word in the photography world. I want my pictures to sell in the 6 digits.

One problem. Well really, lots of problems, none of that was going to happen any way, but something else happened. My spirit became entwined with Christ's Spirit. My spirit was made alive inside me, and my life is hidden with Christ in God.

And when that happened, a war broke out. Christ's Spirit in combination

with my once dead, but now living spirit is at war with my old self, my flesh saying, you can't have that stuff. That's for them. That's for this world. It isn't for you.

Paul pictures this struggle as "old man" against "new man" in Colossians 3:9-10

*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--*

Listen to Peter's words again and see if what I've just said doesn't make perfect sense. *11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*

The next verse is really interesting to me. Because if we really do what Peter has exhorted us, the gap between the world and us gets wider, and wider, and that makes the world really really angry with us.

Quick test. Is the world angry with the church? And if it isn't, are those churches that are receiving the worlds accolades, really churches? Because Peter says;

*12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

First, the word excellent. *Keep your behavior **excellent*** The word could also be translated with these parallel words and ideas. lovely. winsome. fine. gracious. fair to look at. noble. And I would add, in the current vernacular; classy.

In my lifetime, there has been a noticeable shift away from these words by the world. The world is getting kind of scary. We used to see some of these ideas present at a time when christianity was held in high regard as a standard to live by.

But as God is cast off by this world, so are these traits, and we see their

opposite becoming more and more the norm. Western civilization came from the influence of this book on the world. And as this book is jettisoned to the trash heap, so also these ideas of grace and nobility.

Excellence recedes and vulgarity takes its place. Nobility recedes and selfishness takes its place. We're watching it real time, and lately we're wondering how much longer it's going to be safe to travel on the highways, or do any number of things we enjoyed in this nation that is moving as quickly and as far away from its christian roots as it possibly can.

Civilization and the freedoms and pleasures that civilization allowed is bound up in Peter's exhortation to christians to *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles*. In a way, it rubbed off on the world. Civilized society happened because of these words of Peter. The broad effect on a society as a result of this book.

What Peter says next is of particular interest to me. Because we are witnessing what Peter describes here, in real time. All around us.

*12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

40 years ago, this verse didn't really register. Perhaps if we studied the time in which Peter lived, we would understand. But 40 years ago, the world, OK, let me qualify that; my world wasn't really engaged in slandering christians.

All that has changed. Slander against our God and against His elect is the order of the day.

Here are some of the things that the world slandered the church with in Peter's time. They said christians rebel against the Roman empire. Christians are atheists. They refuse to worship Ceasar. Christians are subversive to the empire and they hinder economic and social progress. They're opposed to slavery. They are cannibals and they are incestuous.

Those were charges leveled against the elect that Peter was writing to. How interesting that the verses we'll get to next week, God willing, counteract these very charges. Peter says submit to authorities, etc.

So I sat down and tried to come up with a list of current slanders that the world is leveling against real christians. Just a few. The world says christians are evil because;

discrimination. We discriminate against LGBTTTQQ people. We have the audacity to say that people assigned the male gender at birth should not be allowed to undress in the same changing room with little girls. Shocking.

We discriminate against people with sexual preferances that differ from what our book says is the only norm. One woman, one man, married, for life.

We discriminate against women. Some churches still won't allow women to preach! Or be elders. Some christians are complimentarians and not egalitarians. And we discriminate against women who believe they should have the choice to murder their babies.

We say that our book trumps "so-called" science. We have the audacity to challenge what the world affirms as science and we say is not. Just to call it "so-called" science makes them really mad.

In some of the cabinet affirmation hearings we witnessed of late, it was made perfectly clear that to be a white anglo saxon protestant is intolerable. It was the P in wasp that makes it intolerable. It's clear we will never see an evangelical believing christian in some place like the supreme court.

A charge that really makes the world furious is exclusivity. Christians say that ONLY Jesus can save a person. Only believers in Jesus will see heaven. That's discriminatory against all other religions.

And we affirm that God says homosexuality is evil. In fact any sexuality that happens outside of one man one woman in the confines of



marriage, is evil. Slanderous.

The world says we are in the same category as other dangerous radical religions. Any person that believes that they must conform to some sky god who wrote things in an ancient book, and that those writings and beliefs trump what the modern world believes and holds in high regard, and claims their "science" proves, those people are dangerous. Those ideas are radical. Christians are dangerous radicals.

Anyone who would say one ancient book is true and we must be obedient to every tenet. All other books and learning must come under scrutiny and testing measured against this one standard. Anyone who says that is dangerous to society. People like that are crazy and dangerous.

The world says we are unethical because our God is unethical. New atheism says our God is a baby murderer and someone who carries out ethnic cleansing. He's a pig murderer. Jesus sent those pigs over a cliff, and clearly disregarded the pig owners property rights. Our God is insensitive to peoples personal property.

Those are just some of the current slanders being hurled at the church in our day, if, and this is a big if, if we are in fact distinctive from the world. Every form of that is an irritation to the world.

Non-sin exposes sin. Every thing we do that is distinctive from what the world holds acceptable and normal is assigned a name and becomes yet one more thing that they will slander us about.

The fix is obvious. Take away the distinctions, take away the causes of the slander.

Eugene Peterson; some of you have heard of him, others, not so much. He was in the christian radar screen last week. He is a member of esteem, now in his 80's of the Presbyterian Church USA. Those are the liberal presbyterians. And he also authored the incredibly mushy version of the new testament called "The Message".

He was doing a phone interview with Religion News Service and got broadsided with the question about whether he would perform a gay wedding. His denomination blesses that. How about him? And he said yes.

Well, all you-know-what broke loose with conservative evangelicals and it turns out those folks have the most clout with the religious book publishing houses and The largest Christian bookstore chain said that it was considering whether to continue selling Peterson's many books, including The Message, his best-selling paraphrase of the Bible.

Oops. Now money is involved. Lots of it. Within 24 hours he retracted his first statement and affirmed the biblical view of one man, one woman, for life as God's design for fulfillment and families.

Well, the world looks on and says, evangelicalism is this squishy - oozy stuff that changes to accomodate itself to cash flow. Sadly, there may be some truth in that. The world doesn't recognize that many in evangelicalism would not claim Eugene Peterson. Or perhaps that would add to their list of complaints.

Eugene Peterson tried to find middle ground between the Secularism of the world and the dogma's of this book. His denomination is based in religious liberalism which has been trying to accomplish that for over a century now. Make the church attractive to the secular world. That always ends in disaster. The church is compromised, and the world slanders all the more.

Distinctiveness from the world will always cause slander. Light exposes darkness and the darkness hates the light. And this is nothing new. Listen to Paul writing to his son in the faith, Timothy.

*10 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! 12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

This battle is way out of our league. This is a war being waged in spiritual places our eyes can't see. This is the war of Satan against God. We're just collateral damage. We happen to be God's precious possession and thus, Satan would love to get at us. This is as old as the fall into sin in the garden.

Psalms 37:12-15 says this;

*12The wicked plots against the righteous  
And gnashes at him with his teeth.*

*13The Lord laughs at him,  
For He sees his day is coming.*

*14The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow  
To cast down the afflicted and the needy,  
To slay those who are upright in conduct.*

*15Their sword will enter their own heart,  
And their bows will be broken.*

Slander and persecution will be the norm, if we are distinctive in the world. Increasingly so as we move into uncharted territory I never expected to see in my lifetime.

Back to the second part of vs. 12 ***Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.***

There's a couple of ways to look at this idea of people glorifying God in the day of visitation. Both are valid.

First, what is the day of visitation? It's the day we pray for in the Lord's prayer. Thy Kingdom Come. The return of Jesus, in great glory to this world. Decisive victory in this ages old battle of God and Satan.

And there are a couple of ways that our excellent behaviour among the

gentiles can bring glory to Jesus, on that day.

The first is obvious. Some folks in the world will look at our distinctively different lives because of God living in us, and they will be convicted and they will repent and come out of this world, and join us.

That happens, and when it does, those folks will join our throng that will be singing worship on that glorious day. Some will be glorifying God as a direct result of how we lived. Now. People glorifying and worshipping God, because of my witness. That's a huge privilege and responsibility.

And finally, another possibility. God gets His glory either way. Every knee will bow. Some will glorify Jesus in judgement. On that day they will be forced to say, those obnoxious christians that I hated were absolutely right. Jesus is in fact Lord.

How tragic that judgement must come.

Years ago I worked for a short time with a fellow named Harvey. He was an old, worn out, short of breath electrician, about the same age as I am now, and I was a young one. So we got paired. Brains and labor.

One day I told Harvey about Jesus, and what had happened to me. I was a new christian. Harvey not only shut me down, but He told my boss to warn me to never bother him again with religious talk.

In a couple of weeks, Harvey was dead. So on the judgement day when Harvey is making his excuses, will Jesus remind him of that day, riding in the old Ford van when Jim shared about Jesus love and forgiveness and he rejected it.

What we do now will glorify Jesus on that day when He visits this earth and sets up his Kingdom and judges all men. Some men will receive the truth and join in the song of glory. Some men will reject and be forced to glorify Jesus in judgement. Every knee will bow.

We need to live so that *they may because of your good deeds, as they*

*observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.* One way, or another.

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There's just a couple of minutes left but besides the obvious application we just spoke of, I want to share a few thoughts that run parallel to what we've studied this morning.

As we move into the future, if the Lord tarries, what can the church in USA expect. How will the world censure the church. This topic interests me and my red flags go up weekly as I watch what is unfolding in our nation.

Honestly, Tonopah may be the last safe place. But I think churches are going to have to face real and active censure as the secularists and progressives march ever forward.

The first thing that comes to mind is money. Dollars. Again, we aren't the first to be affected, but what if you're a multi-million dollar mega church. Money always makes the questions harder.

Al Mohler was speaking on these things this week and says it will probably not be the churches losing tax incentive and relief that gets hit first, but rather, christian schools that try to hold onto a belief system like we've outlined this morning.

Accreditation is a big deal in the university business. So, what if the schools have to line up on one side or the other in the sexual freedom wars and losing accreditation is what it costs to be true to this book?

And there are other ways to censure. What if the NCAA says christian schools that hold to Biblical teaching can no longer be included in athletics?

Then there's corporate America. We witnessed Bernie Sanders screaming at the top of his lungs that our country doesn't need people who believe what we believe in high places. Corporate America is

already strong-arming places that would take a stand in line with this book.

How long before churches and schools that align with this book can no longer get insurance. Then the censoring lawsuits will come. Are already coming.

Here's a long-shot one that will smack of conspiracy theory wacko-ness. Out where me and Pam work, we have to have an encrypted card that gives us access to not only enter the range, but also to work on government owned computers.

The cards break down and work gets stopped until the technology in the card gets replaced. How long before I have to sign a paper affirming every secular idea that the folks who have control in our government decide I need to affirm, or no access any longer.

Since the crypto card system is cumbersome and prone to failures, how long before my good Uncle decides, if I want to get a paycheck that originates somewhere with him, I'll be required to have an implanted chip that solves all of those problems.

You see where I'm going, and it does sound sort of wacko, but those chips were in the news this very week. Installed in seconds in that little flap of skin that connects your thumb and forefinger. Painless and effective.

These are all just things I'm watching closely. Because having read this book, none of it surprises me. It's good for us to think ahead about how we will meet some of these challenges when they come.

I'll close with some familiar words. Easy to say. So far, fairly easy to do. There's nothing new under the sun. These words are 4000 years old, and we may very well be required to say them again. In 2017. 18  
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14 *"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the*

*River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."* Joshua 24:14,15