

Strangers

“To God’s elect, strangers in the world . . .” “Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in fear . . .” “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul” (1 Peter 1:1, 1:17, 2:11).

I’m sure these verses are familiar to my readers. So I ask, What does it mean that Peter refers to believers—to *us*—as “strangers and aliens”? The patriarchs in the O.T. era also are referred to as “aliens and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13c). Why? We should discuss this because I believe that we modern evangelicals are missing out on something critically important.

Jesus has the right as our Lord to dictate what our worldview should be. He has done that in His Word, the N.T. It’s what we might call the Law of Christ. We’re responsible to live according to His teachings and requirements for He intends to hold us accountable (at the Judgment Seat of Christ). Paul warns us of our accountability in several places; so does Peter (1 Peter 4:17-18). The warnings that we’re to be judged are explicit, and we dare not ignore them.

So, why “strangers and aliens”? I will argue here that if we want to identify with Jesus for salvation, we must identify with Him totally. Jesus was from another dimension, an invisible spiritual one. He came from heaven. And He returned to heaven. He was a unique Person: deity in human form, empowered by the Holy Spirit, having come to reveal the Father. He was King fit to rule all earth, but unlike any other human king He is good and He loves and sacrifices Himself for His subjects. His Kingdom is one of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So if we’re followers of Jesus, we’re to imitate Him, be like Him and do as He did. This means we’re likewise to be different from those all around us who don’t follow Jesus, which is the rest of the world.

“Strangers and aliens” means we’re not here to live comfortably as our unbelieving neighbors do. We’re not here to pass this life in the pursuit of happiness. We don’t belong here. We are a new creation, citizens of heaven, living according to Jesus’ words. We’re only temporarily here on earth, which is a proving ground for us. This existence is our opportunity to express our love for Jesus, the genuineness of our faith and our hope in what’s to come. And to bear fruit for our Lord. We therefore need to see ourselves as separate from this world, detached from its culture and lifestyle; we’re here on mission only. The world is strange to us and we are (or should be) strange to it.

Let’s get this: America is not our country; it’s not a place for us to call home, it’s not a nation deserving of patriotic enthusiasm. Political engagement to make America a better place is alien to Scripture. The “culture wars” are for America’s unbelievers to fight. We’re strangers and aliens here. The horrible judgments described in the Book of Revelation are for the whole world, including America! God really intends in the future to destroy America as we know it. The statue in Daniel 2 is like a Table of Contents for all history. From Babylon thru Persia, Greece and then Rome, the saga of gentile nations progresses. We today are at the bottom, awaiting the Rock, Jesus, to return and set up His everlasting Kingdom.* Our great desire should be for Jesus to come back soon to make the Day of the Lord, His Messianic Kingdom, a reality.

All societies are religious. The issue is, Whose or what religion? Right now, American society is engaged in a battle over which god is to rule.** Many hold to civil religion (a syncretism of nationalism with a superficial understanding of Christianity). Others hold to David Hume’s kind of religion, which is a ghastly mix of Hegelianism, Marxism, rationalism, logical positivism and humanism. (I’ll not use terms such as conservative or liberal; they mean little anymore.) American culture expresses each religion’s values and worldview. These two religions are mutually contradictory and each seeks to dominate the other. Wicked gods are in solidarity with their committed adherents, and the two religions are increasingly angrily competing to see which will ultimately form one organic society. Followers of Jesus should not want to have anything whatsoever to do with any of this. No one is necessarily a member of one of these warring religions. We voluntarily immerse ourselves. Followers of Jesus are—or should be, anyway—strangers to it all. For too many of us, sincere repentance is needed.

The advances narrated in Genesis 4 are not to show the ability of God’s human creatures to build a civilization, but to showcase the progress of evil in the fallen human race. Building cities, devising musical instruments (and thus creating music), raising livestock, metal-work—these examples illustrate what humans did with their sin nature along with

murdering other people. That society was making a “world.” The Tower of Babel episode later on, after the terrible judgment of the Flood, illustrates again the desire of humanity to build and live in a world of their own, deliberately apart from God’s will. The gentile nations during N.T. times had built a sophisticated world. Although civilization today is light-years beyond anything that existed back then, our modern world is really only an advanced reprise of Genesis 4 (and Genesis 11), and it is suffused with the influence of Babylon (and Persia, Greece, and Rome). It’s not something a follower of Jesus should want to be proud of!

The Spirit says this about our world: **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever”** (1 John 2:15-17). Let’s talk about this.

We today totally misunderstand “world.” We suppose it is only those aspects of modernity that are opposed to God and His will. The rest though is OK to use, participate in, and enjoy. NO. “World” is everything! Every value, ideal, belief, assumption, interest, institution, activity, desire—*all of it*—is “world.” World is an all-encompassing system that’s indifferent if not hostile to God. It’s all the product of fallen mankind and is therefore under judgment. It will all come to an end at the Day of the Lord. Nothing in world is “neutral” or amoral. Modern life in the West is inspired and ruled by evil gods as certainly as life in Hindu India is. Peter understands this, which is why he exhorts us to maintain the attitude of an alien or stranger while living in our nation. We’re just passing thru, on mission.

“Wait!” I hear someone wanting to argue. “What about, for example, pianos? And telephones. And cars? And etc. What’s wrong with them?” My response is, Be discerning!!! Are we playing piano to exalt Jesus? Or Chopin? Are we talking on the phone asking for prayer? Or gossiping? Are we driving our cars to do sidewalk evangelism? Or driving to a rock concert? If you ask about the internet, I’ll say that it’s exceedingly close to being irredeemably evil. The Gospel is advancing and churches are being planted in places on our planet where believers don’t have pianos, or telephones or cars, where believers don’t have freedoms, or comforts or money to buy anything more than food for a day. We don’t need what the world has on offer to fulfill the Law of Christ, and what the world offers is poison for our soul. We need to fear God and commit our lives to doing His will, with a holy insouciance regarding all the rest. That’s what being aliens and strangers means.

Christians in today’s America enjoy previously unheard of freedom. If our culture were aggressively persecuting us, perhaps we’d be more discerning about the idolatrous elements of our world. But that’s exactly the point. It’s precisely the absence of persecution and the abundance of freedom and comforts that we have that lure us into worldliness. We need to think deeply about American society and form a worldview that derives from Scripture—and then live it. We need to think also about the demands of the Gospel and not presume upon God’s grace.

“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20) is (or should be) our mindset, controlling how we live.

* Eschatology must control our thinking and our desires. As pre-millennials we ought to live in the expectation of Jesus’ glorious return to establish His Messianic Kingdom and institute the New Covenant for Israel. Post-millennials and amillennials (Reformed churches) are indifferent to identifying as strangers and aliens. The Christian nationalism movement is post-millennial in practice if not officially. Sadly, most evangelicals, even those whose eschatology is pre-millennial, live as if they’re post-millennial or amillennial.

** The “gods” are real. They are supernatural beings that God created, who have been given ruling authority over the Gentile nations. The Creator God, the God of the Bible, has taken from among all the nations only Israel as His to rule over it. As America is a nation of immigrants, the assumption of a multiplicity of gods seems valid. These gods are all wicked. Paul referred to them as “principalities and powers.” The hierarchy of evil beings seems to be demons/gods/Satan. Liberals, crass materialists, use the term “gods” mockingly.