

A STRANGER HERE

Elder Ralph Harris

One evidence that the Spirit of God indwells us is that we feel to be "*strangers and pilgrims*" in this "*present evil world*" (Heb. 11:13, 1st Peter 2:11 & Gal. 1:4). The more we understand "*the plague of our own heart*" and the more we see the vanity of the things of time and sense, the more we will realize that *we are strangers and sojourners in the earth* (Psalms 39:12, 119 & 1st Chronicles. 29:15).

When we look about us and observe the way a great many people think and act, we are reminded of what a great gulf lies between them and us. Proverbs 20:6 says: "*Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness,*" but with us it is much different. By the grace of God we have been blest to understand, as did the apostle Paul, that in us (that is, in our flesh) dwelleth no good thing (see Romans 7:18). In and of ourselves, we are "*as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6). There is a righteousness that consists of the obedience of Lord's people to Him as His awakened children, but the righteousness that justifies them before God is in Christ alone, and is imputed to them without works on their part. Their beliefs in such Biblical truths as these makes them appear very strange in the eyes of an unbelieving world.

We live in a society where it is very common for men to "*receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only*" (John 5:44); a world in which the majority of the inhabitants seem to think that real living and real happiness consists of having great material wealth, taking one's ease, eating, drinking, making merry, etc., (see Luke 12:19). However, those who are "strangers" to the world have been blest to realize that true, "durable riches" are to be found only in the Lord (Prov. 8:18), and, like Moses, we understand that even the "reproach of Christ" is "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). We know that those who *desire to be rich* "*fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*" (I Tim. 6:9). We also know that worldly riches "*certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven*" (Prov. 23:5), for such riches "are not forever" (Prov. 27:24). And in addition to all this we are also aware that idleness and worldly ease and pleasure, will ultimately lead to emptiness and misery (see Isaiah 47:8,9). Those who live in such pleasure are dead while they live (I Tim. 5:6). They do not know what true happiness is.

All such things make Christ's humble followers total strangers to the world. Those who have their heart set on nothing but material things are "uncircumcised in heart" and cannot enter into the sanctuary of the Lord (Ezekiel. 44:9). They have "neither part nor lot in this matter" for their heart is not right in the sight of God (Acts 3:21).

We humbly believe we can count ourselves among those who are "*dead to sin*" (Romans 6:2), for we have been blest to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:13), and have been killed to the love of it. We hate sin, and would avoid it altogether if we could. But we are living in a world that is made up largely of men and women to whom *wickedness is sweet* (Job 20:12), and who *love darkness rather than light* (John 3:19). John said, "*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness*" (I John 5:19). The world of the ungodly is no different now than it was in John's day. They *drink iniquity like water*, "rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked (Job 15:16, Prov. 2:14). And while they are in this awful state they certainly cannot understand us, and we would be making a terrible mistake if we tried to enter into any kind of alliance with them. It would be very much of an unequal yoke (see II Cor. 6:14). The world has been crucified unto us, and we unto the world (Gal. 6:14). We are strangers here.

Much of what the world calls *music* is a terrible annoyance to my soul. It grates on my nerves and makes me want to get as far from it as I can. I often marvel that anyone can listen to such awful noise hours on end, (usually with the volume turned up about as loud as it will go), and keep any semblance of sanity. Somehow, I have no problem imagining the wild Gadarene, if he had lived in our day, having a boom box sitting on one of those headstones where he dwelt (see Luke 8), with that ungodly music blaring at an ear-splitting pitch. I have seen people on television (dancing?) to this kind of instrumental bedlam with wild, obscene gyrations, and I have thought to myself that, just like the demon-possessed Gadarene, these folks surely must not be in their right mind (see Luke 8:35). The main thing I dislike about going to some public eating-places is that they have Juke-boxes, (the word juke, or Gullah, is of African origin, and means *disorderly*), and what kind of music do you suppose is usually being played, loud enough to be heard well down the street? Any time I have found myself in that kind of environment, I have thought to myself, *surely this is not my world. I am a stranger here.*

We live in a materialistic society that murders over a million unborn babies each year; approving this wholesale slaughter while at the same time opposing capital punishment, with some inconsistently arguing that such punishment is "murder," and others that it is too "cruel." Those who oppose out-of-wedlock cohabitation, adultery, homosexuality and such like practices are branded as narrow-minded bigots, old-fashioned prudes or worse. Over forty million people are currently infected with the AIDS virus and millions more are infected with other sexually transmitted diseases. In addition to this, myriad other ills afflict the peoples of the earth, and a great number of tragedies have befallen the nations, including some in our own country. Many other dangers hang over our heads as threats of eminent and cataclysmic casualties, and can

we doubt that such things are clear indicators of God's displeasure? The wonder is that there are no more ravages throughout the world than there are.

We live in a world in which greed abounds and every law of God is contemptuously and insolently violated each moment of every day; a world in which hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year on alcohol and entertainment; a world that is riddled with corruption in high places, where drug dealers and pushers often boast openly of staying out of prison by giving kick-backs to judges and other officials; and a world in which all sorts of crime and vice are rampant and where various forms of child and spousal abuse are common. When we consider these and a host of other evils and injustices in the world we are very forcefully reminded of just how much of a stranger we who try to serve the Lord are here in this worldly environment.

We no doubt feel much as did Moses while he was dwelling in Midian. He felt himself to be "a stranger in a strange land" (Exodus. 2:22). His first son was born there, and he called him "Gershom," which means "a stranger here." And while they dwell upon the shores of time *all* God's regenerated and enlightened people might well be called "Gershom," for this world is not their home. They are only passing through on their way to a better place—that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). That is the place of their *true* citizenship. —
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