

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Pilgrim Ethic

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11–12, KJV 1900)

At this point in his letter to those "...strangers scattered..." Peter directly addresses their/our pilgrim status in this world. I have been outside our country briefly on a very few occasions. In each case, I was asked to show evidence of my U. S. citizenship. During my time on foreign soil, I was doubly conscious of my citizenship, of my "Homeland." If we transfer the analogy to our present spiritual life, we may gain tremendous insights into Peter's admonitions in this context.

Both from Scripture and from personal observation, we may readily conclude that most, if not all, of the problems, and failures, that believers in Christ encounter grows out of their forgetting their true citizenship. As they become too immersed in the culture and values of this world, they slowly lose contact with their "Homeland" and its values. In this broken world, the visible cultivates more appeal than the invisible. Moses was raised in Egypt's palace, but there came a time when the Lord invaded Moses' life and taught him about his true citizenship. How did Moses react?

*By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as **seeing him who is invisible**. (Hebrews 11:27 KJVP; emphasis added)*

Moses could see the pyramids and Egypt's splendor all around him, but he turned his back on it all. He refused identity with his adopted Egyptian family. (Hebrews 11:24) He even consciously chose to be identified with the afflicted people of God over Egypt's riches. (Hebrews 11:25) He understood what the carnal, infant (1 Corinthians 2:1-4) believer who has filled his eyes with images of this world **cannot see**. God knows and sees all things, past, present, and future. We are incredibly myopic. At best, our perspective is shortsighted. Further, we are also fairly limited in that we tend not to focus on more than one thing at a time. Test your natural vision. Look at something close to you. While holding your focus on that object, how well do you see things in the distant background? When we consciously turn our life-focus onto our own Egypt, we throw the distant spiritual realities of God into a fuzzy, out-of-focus status. Moses understood this truth and focused his heart where God directed.

That required him to forsake Egypt and to focus his heart on "...seeing him who is invisible."

I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims.... Peter directs his message to his readers' "Pilgrim" mindset. Interestingly, a major theme or emphasis in First Peter deals with suffering. We may suffer in one of two ways, 1) as a Christian (1 Peter 4:16), or 2) as a sinner. (1 Peter 4:15) Peter's admonitions consistently command us to accept that suffering is inevitable in our fallen, broken world. We choose the basis of our suffering by the moral/ethical decisions that we make and follow. The choice is never between suffering and not suffering, although our deceitful heart may try to convince us that this is the case. In reality, we choose the basis of our suffering by our spiritual and moral choices. Do we contradict Moses' example and live in love with our own version of Egypt? If so, never doubt that we shall face suffering on that path. Moses understood that the path of Egypt provided temporary pleasure to his sinful inclinations. However, he understood what we sometimes choose to ignore. All the pleasures that sin may bring last for a very short season, followed by the bitter sufferings of sin's own consequences, plus God's chastening hand. Think of sin as an alcoholic thinks of his drinking. He thinks of the momentary "Buzz" that gives him a brief sense of elation, but, when he is craving the next drink, he ignores the subsequent "Hangover." Scripture associates sin with drunkenness. (Isaiah 29:9; 51:21; Ephesians 5:18)

...abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Scripture uses the word "Lust" with reference to far more than sexual sin. The word often refers to the general attitude of covetousness and self-serving sinfulness. (Example; James 4:2; read the full context of this passage, a solemn reminder of God's requirement that we devote our lives to serving both Him and His people, but not ourselves.

Peter reminds us of the central truth of sin's character. Whenever we rationalize sin in our lives, we choose to ignore its consequences. Every fleshly lust, whatever its object, declares war against the soul. It grows in the soil of unbelief, the faithless notion that Satan used to entice Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Surely this forbidden thing would be good for you. Perhaps God is trying to

prevent you from enjoying some greater pleasure or gain. "Yea, hath God said...." Whenever Satan entices us to sin, he must attack our foundations of faith and truth by throwing a cloud of doubt or suspicion over God's revelation in Scripture. Every siren song that Satan sings to tickle the fancy of our sinful appetites has one objective, though he is quite adroit at hiding that purpose. He and his tactics always declare war against the soul. To think that we can reach our hands into the "Cookie jar" of sin and withdraw a tasty morsel without the consequences that God has revealed in Scripture is self-delusional. (Numbers 32:23)

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. We do not avoid Satan's snares by passively doing nothing. We avoid them only by filling our lives with godly, honest conduct. It is possible that some of the people to whom Peter wrote this letter were in fact cultural/racial Gentiles, but they were "Spiritual Jews." Peter rejects the convenient "When in Rome, do as the Romans" motto. His rule rather requires that we live as citizens of heaven at all times, in all settings, and with all kinds of people.

Be prepared. The more you live your faith in the presence of ungodly people, the more hostility you will face from them. Even in your strongest and most faithful moment, they will ridicule you. They may even try to blame you for their own bad actions. Despite Israel's abominable idolatry, God sent one of the most notable prophets in the Old Testament to warn them and to call them back to repentance, Elijah. Consider two men at the center of the stage during this era of Israel's history, Ahab, the wicked, Baal-worshipping king, and Elijah, the prophet of God. Now study one brief encounter between these two men.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? (1 Kings 18:17 KJVP; emphasis added)

Ahab couldn't see beyond his ego and his ambition to rule Israel without anyone to oppose, especially anyone who dared to remind Israel of their true God. Ahab and Jezebel are at the heart of abominable Baal-worship in Israel. Yet, Ahab sees nothing beyond his own ambition. He dares to accuse Elijah of being the man who "...troubleth Israel." I have observed sin in the workplace, in families, and, even at times in churches. Where ever you see sin raging, you will see sinners working to point the finger of blame at someone else. Sinners love pointing the finger of blame at others as much as they loath acknowledging that they are personally responsible for their own sins. I recall talking to a man who was enslaved to alcohol. He had just ended a divorce in which he, no surprise, blamed his former wife for the breakup. On his wedding day, he pointed at his new bride

and said, "She is going to make everything right in my life." He refused to accept personal responsibility, even for his hope of future success. Within a few years, his new and sadly predictable song about his new wife was "She is the cause of everything that has gone wrong in my life."

How refreshing it is to see a godly person face life with trust and hope in God. These good people will look directly into the face of their failures and sins, confessing in the words of the prodigal, "I have sinned...." (Luke 15:21) God's healing balm for His sinning, struggling children is quite direct and simple. Confession and repentance brings the Lord's refreshing, healing seasons. (Acts 3:19)

Peter expands his exhortation. While some Gentiles may remain forever aliens to God and hostile to your faith, God shall surely visit some of them with saving grace and change them. Regardless of how wicked the people whom we may encounter in life's travels, God commands us to stand fast in our faith-walk. We just may at times stand fast in the face of an evildoer's wilting blasphemy, not knowing that, at some future time, God in saving grace may visit that very person. If that be the case, how will this person recall his/her encounter with you at that past time? Peter directs us to live so blamelessly before this evildoer, that, should God later visit that person, he/she will recall you and your godly grace. The very deeds that this person once despised now become the deeds by which this newly born child of the King remembers you. Words and deeds that he/she once despised now become the very words and deeds that encourage this weeping sinner to glorify God and to seek you out for words of grace. If, at the time of your encounter with this person, you wilted and gave in to the "...fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," that person might recall you, but not with any thought of glorifying God for the experience.

The old fashioned radio preacher, J. Vernon McGee, told an instructive story that makes this point. A poor farmer was also an alcoholic, but he tried to hide his sinful weakness from his young son. He hid his alcohol in the corn crib in the barn. When he wanted to drink, he'd make an excuse to go to the barn to take care of the animals. One day in the cold of winter, he made his excuse and started to walk out of the house. His young son pleaded to go along with him, but Dad refused. Intent on his sinful appetite, Dad went straight to the crib and took a deep drink of his secret stash. As he was walking through the snow back to the house, he heard the sound of little feet tramping through the snow. Looking back, he saw his young son. When he asked his son why he had disobeyed, the son looked up in innocent love and said, "Dad, I love you. I want to walk in your tracks." Oh, how often we walk the wrong path without realizing that young, admiring eyes may be watching our every step. What kind of example are we leaving with our tracks in the snow? Do we live as "Pilgrims" or as belonging to this world?

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Worship service each Sunday
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10:30 A. M.
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