

In case you have not already read it, I would highly recommend the famous classic written by John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress. (There is a very good new edition published by Crossway Books, and it has excellent pictures!) The subtitle of Pilgrim's Progress is: From this world to that which is to Come.

That is the Christian Life. It is the journey of the people of God through the wilderness of this world, by God's grace, all the way to our Heavenly Homeland. This life is described to us in all of Scripture. It is especially described to us in the book of I Peter, a letter written to Christians who are going through the fires of persecution 迫害. And it is given to us in a summary form in these two verses, I Peter 2:11-12.

First, this passage points out the wilderness life of the Christian pilgrim.

**Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.** (I Peter 2:11)

These two words, **sojourners** and **pilgrims**, identify every Christian in every age. As the apostle Peter has just said in verses 9-10, these are titles for all **the people of God: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.** (I Peter 2:9-10). And now, in verse 11, Peter calls this people of God, living in the age of the new covenant, God's beloved sojourners and pilgrims.

These are people who have come to Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, and, in Jesus, they have become living stones who are being built into a spiritual house, the Church: **Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men but chosen by God and precious 珍贵, you also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house.** (I Peter 2:4-5) That explains how we have become pilgrims in this world. Once we were at home in this world, but Christ called us out of the "house" of this world and brought us into His spiritual house, the Church. As Christians who belong to Christ and His Church we are now a people set apart as holy. We are *different*. We are *strangers*.

It is because of what Christ has done for us that Peter calls the beloved people of God living in this world **sojourners 寄居者 and pilgrims**. What do these words mean? It means we no longer belong to this world. We are exiles and aliens here, temporary residents, living in a land that is not our own, looking for the heavenly country which is our own. It's not that we are *homeless*, we are just not yet *home*. We are a people whose life is governed by the promises of Christ not by the promises of this world.

We are very much like the Church in the Old Testament, a wilderness people travelling on our way to the Promised Land of God's Rest. The book of Hebrews uses this picture of Israel in the Old Testament to describe the Church's condition today.

- It warns pilgrims today: Just as many of the Church in the Old Covenant age did not make it to the Promised Land of Rest because they did not trust in God, so also the pilgrims of the Church in the New Covenant must **"Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort 告诫 one another daily."** (Hebrews 3:12) **Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.** (Hebrews 4:11)
- And it also promises pilgrims that just as the LORD provided His Old Testament wilderness people Manna from heaven, water from the Rock, sandals that did not wear out, and everything they needed to reach the Promised Land, so also through Christ our Great High Priest the Lord God provides everything we need in the Ministry of the Gospel and the Communion of the saints to reach our heavenly destination. We must simply keep on looking to Him and trusting His promises, and encourage one another daily on this journey as pilgrims.

When the Bible calls us pilgrims in I Peter 2:11, it is using the same word used in Hebrews 11 that describes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abram was called out of Babylon to live in the land of Canaan which was not yet his own. **They confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.** (Hebrews 11:13b) It describes Abram as a tent-dweller: **By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose build and maker is God.** (Hebrews 11:9-10) The country they were really looking for was not Canaan, but **they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.** (Hebrews 11:16)

The Bible urges us as those who confess Christ as our Saviour to see ourselves as pilgrims living here in tents. We must be loosely attached to this world because we are on the move toward our heavenly country which God has prepared for us.

- We are a people who are in this world but do not belong to this world.  
Jesus said of His disciples: **They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.** (John 17:14)
- Just as Jesus was rejected by this world, so the world rejects us because we belong to Him by faith.  
**If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.** (John 15:19)
- As pilgrims we are not to love this world nor live for this 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. (1 John 2:15)  
**If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.** (Colossians 3:1-2)

**Second, as Christ's pilgrim people in the wilderness, we will also recognize the holy war raging 肆虐 within us.**

**Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.** (I Peter 2:11)

Christ's Pilgrims are a people constantly engaged in internal warfare for their souls. Fleshly lusts war against our souls. The word "war" means literally "to serve as a soldier." Fleshly lusts are serving as soldiers against your soul. There are thousands and thousands of soldiers battling against your soul to try to take you down and make you their captive. These soldiers of fleshly lusts are fighting hard to try make you give up your pilgrimage and to make you comfortable in this world.

John Bunyan saw this clearly in Pilgrim's Progress. In that book he turned these fleshly lusts into names of places and persons: Vanity Fair, the Hill of Difficulty, Doubting Castle, Mr. Pliable, Mr. Atheist, Mr. Formalist, Mr. Hypocrisy, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Talkative, Mr. Moneylove, Mr. Legality, Mr. Slothful, Mrs. Wanton, Mr. Ignorance, and a whole cast of characters. And they're all there to distract Christian from his journey toward the heavenly city. They all attack his soul and tempt him to take the easy way, and not think too hard about God and heaven.

And this is true for every Christian. At every moment fleshly lusts war against the soul. Fleshly lusts are sinful longings or desires of all kinds and the sinful behaviours that come out of them. These lusts are described all over the Bible. They include things like sexual immorality, envy, strife, drunkenness, drinking parties (carousing), the love of money (greed), fear of pain and loss, distractions, sloth (spiritual laziness), complaining, pride, self-love, hatred, murder, idolatry, fits of rage, deceit, obscene淫猥talk, anxiety焦急, putting the cares of this life before seeking God's kingdom, gossip 闲话, rudeness, coldheartedness, and lying.

Fleshly lusts can be described as both positive and negative.

- In the positive sense they are inclinations 倾向 to go against God and His kingdom, and to walk in the way of sin.
- In the negative sense they are inclinations not to bother with spiritual things, with prayer and the study of God's Word and growing in grace and fighting sin.

Each fleshly lust is a seed of destruction which, if planted, and allowed to sprout 萌芽 and grow and bear fruit, will destroy your soul, your life, and your witness. They are highly dangerous enemy soldiers. They will pull the pilgrim off his pathway to the heavenly city, and into prisons of darkness where sin will molest them until it finally destroys them.

The apostle Paul writes: **If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.** (Romans 8:13)

Peter leaves no question about this warfare: if you are a pilgrim of Christ, these lusts and many more are at war against your soul. And so there can be only two possibilities: either you are watching for them and fighting against them, or you are living at ease, imagining you are doing well, and letting them take over. These **fleshly lusts** are exactly that: *lusts 欲望 or desires*. They do not politely knock on your door and ask if they can come in, nor do they break down the door and force themselves in against your will. They are soldiers that come near to you and pull your desires in the direction of sin and death. **Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.** (James 1:14)

They seduce and entice 勾引 you; they tempt you and pull you into their grip. They make pleasant promises to you of a satisfying, comfortable, easy, pleasurable and pain-free life. And you listen to them, and willingly give in to them, all the while convincing yourself that this cannot do you any real harm.

And that is why Peter begs the beloved people of God to **abstain** 避免 from them. Abstain! **Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.** To abstain means *to hold yourself back constantly from them*. Often we are called to put fleshly lusts to death. But here we are called not even to let them have a beginning! Avoid these evil desires which want to weaken your soul and break it down until there's nothing left of your Christianity.

If you abstain from them in your soul's desires, then they will certainly not become part of your life's conduct. For your soul and your conduct are tightly related. What the soul thinks and desires, the rest of the life follows. For this reason Paul moves from **abstaining from fleshly desires** in verse 11 to **having honorable conduct** in verse 12. The one is required for the other. If you want God-glorifying behaviour that witnesses Jesus Christ to the world, it starts with abstaining from evil desires.

How to abstain from evil desires and maintain your pilgrim way:

1. Stay focused on Christ. Stay focused on His death that destroyed the guilt and power of your sin. Stay focused on the promised inheritance in heaven that is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His ascension into heaven. **Rest your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** (I Peter 1:13) Make the Word of salvation your daily food and drink. **As newborn babies, crave 切望 the pure spiritual milk of the word, that you may grow in your salvation.** (I Peter 2:2) The best way for the pilgrim to fight against the things that will pull him off the pilgrim's pathway is to stay strong in his pilgrim identity as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. A person is much more vulnerable to the assaults of sinful desires when his heart is growing cold toward his Saviour! It is only by faith in Christ that we can persevere as pilgrims!
2. Stay alert to the presence and persistence of these enemy soldiers in your own mind and heart. Stay alert to the hatefulness of sin. It is the spiritual equivalent of dirt – very ugly and very guilty. Stay alert to the deceitfulness of sin – it pulls you away and takes over long before you know it! Stay alert to the deadliness of sin. Don't fall asleep on the job. Don't be ignorant of the nature of the Christian life as a constant warfare against the evil one. Your own destruction lies very close at hand every moment. If you think it will never happen to you, it will! As the prophet Amos said: **Woe to you who are at ease in Zion!** (Amos 6:1) Jesus put it very simply: **Watch and pray lest you fall into temptation!**
3. **Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh!** (Galatians 5:16) This is a promise that you must cling to and use many times every day. No matter how long you have been a Christian, and how well you have fought the good fight to this point, you are always extremely weak, unstable, and have no strength of our own to fight sin. We must constantly pray for the Spirit to enable us to

do #1 and #2 above. Pray for the Spirit to lead you deeper and deeper into the beauty of Christ and the glorious salvation He has accomplished for you. Pray for the Spirit also to show you more and more the wickedness of sin. And as you in dependence on the Holy Spirit grow in your love for the Son, He will drain the life out of sin.

**Third, this passage teaches us that the purpose of our pilgrim life on this earth is to be a God-glorifying witness. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.** (1 Peter 2:11-12)

As pilgrims and strangers, the world despises and rejects us as they did Christ, our Master. The world accuses us of bigotry because we say Christ is the only Way and Christianity is the only true religion, of child abuse because we discipline our children, of brainwashing because we train our children in the fear of the Lord, of chauvinism 沙文主义 because we believe male headship in the church and at home, of being judgmental because we make judgments about abortion and homosexuality and Islam and atheism 无神论 and pre-marital sexual relations, and on and on.

The people of this world constantly judge us for our holy, heavenly belief in the truth, and our holy, heavenly conduct. **In regard to lewdness 淫荡, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation 耗散, speaking evil of you.** (1 Peter 4:3-4) Jesus explained that they speak evil of the light because they don't want their darkness to be exposed (see John 3:20, 7:7).

How must the Christian pilgrim respond to such unfair accusations? Should we tone it down a little, and compromise, so that we look more like the world, and make the world feel more comfortable, and they like us more? To our shame this is often the way we take. Two weeks ago at London's Gay Pride parade, the United Church of Canada led the way! But should we really expect that by being less different, less strange, less offensive and less Christian we can make Christ more attractive to the Gentiles? Absolutely not!

Instead, we should respond simply by offering more of the very thing the world hates, more of the good works that causes the world to speak evil of us! **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable (ESV)!** Do more of the same, not less! Three verses later we read: **For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.** (1 Peter 2:15)

For this is the only way to get the world to believe our message about God. Now, as then, God carries no weight. People could care less about their sin, the holiness of God, and the judgment. People laugh at the need for a Saviour to take their sin and God's wrath upon Himself. God receives no glory in our culture. And it is our task to show by our God-fearing, holy lives, that God is the Supremely Important One to Whom everyone must give an account. We must persist in showing to our culture this God by persisting in living a glorious, honourable life that represents Him very well.

John Piper writes: *If we live our lives in such a way that they don't point people to the glory of God, then our lives are without positive significance from a Christian standpoint. What we become is just an echo of a God-neglecting culture. We fit into the world so well that our lives don't point beyond the world. We are no longer aliens 外星人 and strangers, but simply conforming citizens of the God-ignoring world.*

In a world where true significance lies in the World Series, what vehicle you drive, how much money you make, how much fun you have, how athletic you are, what degrees you hold, and what channels you get, we must show that true significance lies in knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ. This the pilgrim's pathway. Anyone who calls himself a pilgrim, but is living for this world, is a pretender, not a pilgrim. If God and heaven are not our daily focus, if heaven is for us something thrown in as a nice benefit at the end of the ride, then we cannot honestly claim that Jesus Christ has taken hold of us and that we belong to Him.

But God promises that when we live the life of a pilgrim – making a difference by being different – He will visit the Gentiles with mercy and use our good deeds to give them an open ear to the Gospel and convert them. When our passage speaks of **the day of visitation**, this most likely does not refer to Day of Judgment at the end of history, but to the day of salvation in history when God in His good pleasure sends them the Gospel. Though the unbeliever scorns you now because of your transformed, God-glorifying life, don't give up, and don't give in, but go on, and ask God to use your honourable Christian conduct to convert that God-blasphemer into a God-glorifier. If Christ did that for you, He can also do that for him.

### Conclusion

There is only one power that can make you a pilgrim and keep you a pilgrim. There is only one power that can make you abstain from fleshly lusts, and make your conduct honourable before a watching world. That is the power of Jesus Christ. His death on the cross for sin, and His resurrection to new life on the third day is the only power that can truly set you apart from this world, make you a new person – a pilgrim on the pathway to the heavenly country. As you trust in Him, His Spirit will keep you on the pilgrim's pathway to the end.

If you are not a true Christian pilgrim; if you are just a pilgrim in name but not in deed; or if you have never confessed Christ and remain outside of Him; if you are stranger to God and a friend of this world, I urge you to come to the Living Stone, Jesus Christ, and ask Him to make you a living stone. Ask Him to take away your sin and give you a new life. Ask Him to rescue from this world which is headed for destruction, and to make you a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Then you too will become a pilgrim whose life is no longer set on a world that is perishing, but on Christ who lives forever.

That is not an easy life, but the only life worth living, because it brings glory to God!