

Home Bible Study, 6 May 2020

Read the bible passage from 1 Peter 2:11-25

Having shown the wonder of God's salvation through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1) and exhorted the early converts to strive to live as God's holy people, modelling their life on Christ (our study last week), Peter now continues by urging them not to be led astray by the ways of the pagans. He commences by addressing them as 'aliens and exiles' (v.11, NRSV).

1. What do you understand by the term 'aliens and exiles'?
2. How might these terms relate to Christians in the world approximately 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection – when the letter was probably written?

Later, in v.18, Peter addresses his letter to 'slaves'. The context suggest that he is addressing Christian slaves. 'Aliens, exiles and slaves' – these terms lead us to ask, to whom is Peter writing?

Peter tells us in the salutation of his letter that he is writing 'To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ...' (1 Peter 1:1-2, NRSV) Is he then writing literally to the scattered Jews? Or is he writing figuratively? We need to clarify this to be clear about his message.

J.H. Elliott argues that the literal meaning should be taken. The Greek word used by Peter is *parepidemos* which designates a temporary visitor as distinct from *paroikos* - a resident alien. By this argument, Peter is writing to people who would not have the same rights and privileges as the native residents in the community. This would make more sense of why Peter addressed slaves in the same group.

However, other bible scholars argue that we should set aside the literal meaning and take the figurative meaning, i.e. that Peter is writing to people who had become estranged from their culture when conversion to Christianity resulted in a radical change in their behaviour (Jews converting to Christianity and no longer being subject to the Jewish

laws and/or Gentiles who convert from pagan beliefs to Christian beliefs).

3. Read 1 Peter 4:3-4. How do these verses support the view that Peter is writing to people who have converted to Christianity?

If this is so, then Peter's audience of 'resident aliens' would equate more with Christians today and this is the way we tend to read this passage in our churches.

4. How then, might the terms 'aliens and exiles' relate to Christians today?
5. Christians also use the term 'pilgrims' to describe themselves. What do you understand by the term and how does this relate to being aliens and exiles?

Peter continues to say that we (resident aliens) are to, 'abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.' (v.11b, NRSV).

6. What do you understand by the term, 'desires of the flesh'? (The NIV translates this as, 'sinful desires')
7. What do you think Peter means by the term, 'wage war against the soul'?

The implication of Peter's exhortation is that those to whom he is writing once lived sinfully and may possibly slip back into some of those old sinful ways - which lead to certain implications.

We too can lose our way as we go on our journey as Christian pilgrims in an alien world.

8. What are ways that we might lose our way and do ourselves an injury? Reflect on this before reading further.

Here are some general suggestions to add to your list:

- Stray in relationships
- Lose sight of commitments
- Become preoccupied and distracted
- Compromised principles, forget priorities, sense of purpose dimmed.
- Turn away from what is most important – willingly head down a path of destruction.

9. Have you ever given in to the desires of the flesh?

10. What pushes you to compromise your conscience?

Peter's advice to slaves (vv.18-21a) can still be a little puzzling. Slavery was widespread in Peter's world. Apparently, he is not concerned about social stability or the perpetuation of slavery. He takes for granted faithful service on the part of the Christian household slaves.

11. How might we apply these verses to ourselves?

Peter relates the suffering of the Christian slaves to Jesus' suffering. Jesus was mistreated, endured pain, and suffered unjustly while entrusting it all to God.

As Christians you and I are not likely to have to suffer for our beliefs. (Some might say that our greatest threat is apathy.) But there are Christians in the world who do suffer for their beliefs. The latest edition of the magazine of **Barnabas Fund**, an aid agency for the persecuted church was delivered to us only three days ago. (*You may wish to borrow it to read – if so, text me and I will bring it to you.*) Among other ongoing suffering, the magazine indicates that Christians in some countries are being blamed for the COVID-19 virus and subsequently are being persecuted and even face death because of their faith.

But in other ways we too experience suffering. Peter seems to be saying that the least the slaves can do is to show their willingness to serve God where he has placed them. They are to accept and live with their suffering and learn from it. Importantly, the people endure suffering

because they are pursuing good – doing good deeds and glorifying God – not because they are doing evil.

12. What lessons from this passage might we derive for ourselves as we go through suffering?
13. Would you agree that the following lessons apply?
 - We often bring suffering upon ourselves.
 - We should refrain from responding in kind.
 - We are to entrust ourselves entirely to God.
 - We cannot do it alone.

Some further questions to consider:

14. If you thought of this chapter as a roadmap for a Christian's life, what would be the safest "roads" to take, as taught in this chapter? And what would be the unsafe, dangerous roads to avoid?
15. In verse 12, look at the command given, and at the result we're to aim for. Since this result is set in the future, how can we know how well we're obeying this command?
16. Look at the command in verse 13. How fully do you think Christians are obeying this teaching today?
17. In verse 16, notice what Peter tells us what not to do. In what ways would you say Christians are most in danger of doing this?
18. Look at verse 17. What would you say is an especially good starting point for applying any of these commands more effectively to your life?
19. How might Paul have enlarged on Peter's exhortation in verse 11, based on what you read in Rom 12:1-2 and 13:14?