



SESSION 5

I AM JUST PASSING THROUGH

The Point

Our lives in this world should reflect our eternal home.

The Passage

1 Peter 2:11-17

The Bible Meets Life

We all have a place we call home; it shows up on legal documents as our place of residence. Even though we may live there all our lives, that place is temporary for the follower of Christ. We have a permanent, eternal home in Christ. While we have obligations related to our current residence, we can live our lives in such a way to remind ourselves and others that we have a greater home in Christ.

The Setting

In one sense, the home of Peter's first readers was Asia Minor. We know the region as modern Turkey. In another sense, Peter's readers were foreigners in this world and to this world's system. They faced many pressures and temptations in their culture. They needed to know how to live with integrity as good witnesses whose lives would glorify God and reflect their eternal home with Him. Peter wrote to help them meet this challenge.

What does the Bible say?

The Gentiles (v. 12)—This is a term Peter used to refer to unbelievers in the culture generally, since he referred to believers with terms usually applied to Israel (1 Peter 2:9).

The day he visits (v. 12)—This phrase probably refers to the day of Christ's second coming (2 Peter 3:3-10).

1 Peter 2:11-17 (CSB)

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.

¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority

¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

¹⁶ Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves.

¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Display a map of your state or region of the country. Invite group members to draw a star or place a marker to show where they were born or grew up. *(Note: If you know your group members were mostly raised in your city, you can use a city map for this activity.)*

DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 109 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): **“What place feels most like home to you? Explain.”**

Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 110): As a child, my family lived in six different homes. Each one was unique. Some homes were small; some were large. Some had big backyards; others didn’t. Some homes were in the city; some were in the country.

As an adult, we have continued the trend of frequent moving. My wife and I have lived in eleven different residences in three different states. The thought of carrying a couch through a narrow front door ever again makes me want to pull my hair out. Few things are more exhausting than the moving process.

When you move a lot, it’s difficult to determine where “home” really is.

SAY: “Whether you’ve lived in many places or if you were born and raised in just one place, Peter reminded us that Christians are all just passing through; this world as we know it is only temporary.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 110 of the PSG: **“Our lives in this world should reflect our eternal home.”**

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer.

TIP: Be prepared well enough to be able to adjust the focus of your group as needed. Solid preparation allows you not to be bound to your notes, so that as you listen you can adjust the discussion to respond to comments and questions.

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PACK POSTER:
Pack Item #10
“Strangers” poster
PLAYLIST PICK:
“So Good to Me”
By Zach Williams



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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1 Peter 2:11-12 (CSB)

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you had the opportunity in recent weeks to live out the commands in these verses?

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 2:11-12.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 111 of the PSG: **“What are the practical implications of living as strangers and temporary residents?”** (Note: Help your group think through the benefits, consequences, and experiences of living somewhere temporarily as well as what it means that our eternal home is with Christ.)

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #10**, “Strangers” poster, to help group members think critically about what it means to be strangers and temporary residents in our culture. Encourage group members to contribute adjectives that describe strangers today and record them in the blank spaces. Then use the list of descriptors to compare the experiences of strangers and exiles in biblical times with the experience of strangers and exiles today.

STRANGERS

BIBLICAL TIMES		OUR TIMES
<input type="checkbox"/>	Refugee	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foreigner	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nomadic	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sojourner	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Migrant	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Desperate	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uncertain	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcomed	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 111-112): For Christians, our stay in this present world is merely a temporary one; our ultimate destination is “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). That’s why Peter called us “strangers and exiles” (v. 11). We won’t find our true identity in any earthly address.

- » Because the world is not our true home, Peter told us not to be seduced by the “sinful desires” (v. 11) that tug at us. Even as followers of Christ, the old sin nature still rears its ugly head and seeks to pull us into sin.
- » In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can “abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul” (v. 11). We are to abstain from living in sin—living like this world is our home—not just for personal holiness but also as a testimony to “the Gentiles” (v. 12), those outside the faith. Our good works will draw others to “glorify God on the day he visits” (v. 12).

TRANSITION: Peter’s instructions didn’t stop there. In the next verses, he emphasized the importance of submitting to authority.

1 Peter 2:11-12 Commentary

Verse 11: While we live as “strangers and exiles” in this world, we have the responsibility of representing our eternal King well. The idea of God’s people being strangers in a land that is not their home has deep roots in the Old Testament. Jacob and his sons were strangers in Egypt. The people of Israel were strangers and exiles in Babylon. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced being strangers in a foreign land. As believers, we live in this world now, but we are “temporary residents on the earth . . . seeking a homeland . . . a better place—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13-16). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). Jesus has gone there to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). Our home is with Him.

While we are in this world we are to “abstain from sinful desires.” The danger of sinful desires is real because they can do great damage to and even destroy the soul. Though you have been redeemed from “the desires of your former ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14), you still have a battle to fight with them. In fact, you and I are probably more aware of the conflict with sinful desires as believers than we ever were before we belonged to Christ. Feeling the conflict intensely is a common experience for people serious about growing in godliness. We should expect the conflict and be vigilant.

Verse 12: Instead of succumbing to sinful desires, you are to embrace virtue. That is, you are to “conduct yourselves honorably.” We are to be honorable men and women in our communities and work places where we are “among the Gentiles.” When Peter referred to “the Gentiles,” he was referring to the many unbelievers among whom his readers were living. Believers in Christ are to represent our God in the sight of unbelievers.

Though your conduct is honorable, some of “the Gentiles” might “slander you as evildoers.” When we do not embrace the culture’s moral norms, we may be labeled bigots, narrow-minded, haters, and enemies of societal progress. It is unfair, but it’s not new and should not be surprising. In fact, the situation presents an opportunity. Slanderers and opponents and others may see our good works. Some will take note of our integrity, purity, courage, and reliability. They will see that we help our neighbors, give generously, and love and serve even our enemies.

Because of believers’ honorable lives and good works, unbelievers will “glorify God on the day he visits.” Peter seems at this point to be echoing Jesus’ words: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “The day he visits” probably refers to “the day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:10) when Christ will come.

1 Peter 2:13-15 Commentary

Verses 13-14: As a part of living honorably in this world, believers are to “submit to every human authority.” It is not that the authorities are more important than we are, nor that they are more powerful than we are. Instead, we submit “because of the Lord.” It is the Lord’s desire and command for us to submit rightly to earthly authorities. We submit to them because we submit to Him.

Peter first named the emperor as “the supreme authority” in the Roman governmental framework. The emperor of Rome when Peter wrote this letter was Nero. Peter then referred to “governors as those sent out” by the emperor. Pilate is a New Testament example of a governor. Just like Peter’s early readers, we have the responsibility of submitting rightly to authorities. We may be able to see many flaws in governmental authorities. Nero and Pilate had many flaws for Peter to see. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he was a coward in the face of mob pressure and condemned Him to crucifixion. Nero grew increasingly cruel over the course of his reign. When Peter was writing this letter, Nero’s flaws were already on display. Peter nonetheless required submission. This should lead us to be very cautious about appealing to flaws in leaders as justification for a refusal to submit to their authority.

Though human authorities are flawed, an important purpose of human government is “to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.” Of course, the Bible recognizes there are limits on obeying human authorities. In Egypt, Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill newly born male children. The midwives disobeyed the command because they feared God (Exodus 1:15-17). God was pleased with them. Hundreds of years later in Babylon, a powerful earthly king commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to fall down and worship a gold statue. They refused (Daniel 3:16-18). God was pleased with them. If obeying a human authority means disobeying God, we are to obey God. Barring such unusual circumstances, believers are to submit to government authorities.

Verse 15: Again, Peter pressed home the reason for submission: “it is God’s will.” Our ultimate allegiance is to God, not to Caesar or to a president. Submission to the authorities God has placed over us is an act of submission to Him. We obey government authorities because we obey God. Further, it is God’s will that through consistent submission to authorities “you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.” In Peter’s day, critics and slanderers made much of Christians not participating in idolatrous sacrifices and civic and social events that were morally off-limits to believers. These slanders ignorantly labeled Christians as troublemakers, societal problems, and even anarchists. The fact is that sincere Christians are great assets to any society. Peter envisioned that by obeying just laws and living honorably as citizens and residents, believers would show that the inaccurate criticisms against them were baseless.

1 Peter 2:16-17 Commentary

Verse 16: Peter turned at this point to practical counsel regarding our attitudes and motives as we submit to human authorities. Peter's practical counsel is for believers to "submit as free people." We are free because we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (1:18-19). That is, we've been purchased out of slavery. We are no longer slaves to the desires and behaviors that formerly controlled us. We are free to act in love and respect toward authorities. Further, believers aren't to use this freedom as a "cover-up for evil." We all know freedom can be misused. Christian freedom is not a license to unnecessarily oppose and offend human authorities. At times, believers do well to forgo exercising rights out of consideration for others. We are free to do even more than authorities require of us!

Believers are also to submit "as God's slaves." "Slaves" is an appropriate word here. It conveys that we belong to God. He owns us, having bought us at a price (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The fact is that every human being is a slave either to sin or to God (Romans 6:16,20-22). Because believers are enslaved to God they have true freedom from sin. They are free to obey God. True freedom is in slavery to God. When we submit to human authorities we don't need to think of ourselves as "under the thumb" of the government or "kept down" by powerful people. Instead, we are obeying our God. We are choosing to live in keeping with His high calling.

Verse 17: It is God's will that believers "honor everyone." All human beings bear God's image; therefore, we are to treat all human beings with dignity. Further, God's invitation to receive eternal life in Christ and become children of God is to everyone (John 3:16). We are to love and honor everyone. We are especially to "love the brothers and sisters" in Christ. Peter encouraged believers to love one another two other times in this letter (1 Peter 4:8; 5:14). When believers are slandered in the world, love from their brothers and sisters is precious to them. It also makes an impression on the world. Jesus taught that a key feature of our witness to the world is our love for one another (John 13:34-35).

Peter concluded his instructions on submitting to authorities with contrasting commands: "fear God" and "honor the emperor." The message is powerful. Notice that Peter did not write "fear the emperor." God alone is worthy of the fear (or "reverence," 1 Peter 1:17) that shows in absolute obedience. We are not to fear people. We are only to fear God. A Roman emperor or other authority may inflict temporal suffering. Only God has the power and prerogative to assign eternal suffering (Matthew 10:28). If our choice genuinely comes down to obeying a human authority or obeying God, then we are always to obey God. We are always to honor human authorities and we are always to fear God. If we do, God will lead us to relate rightly to authorities and reflect His greatness and our eternal home.

