

Three Rules For Christian Pilgrims.

Text: 1 Pet 2:11-20

Suggested Hymns:

308, 203, 342, 290, 347

- 1) Abstain From Fleshly Lusts Which War Against The Soul
- 2) Submit Yourselves To Every Ordinance Of Man For The Lord's Sake
- 3) If You Are Wronged, Take It Patiently

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Peter 2:11–20, ¹¹ *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,* ¹² *having your conduct honorable 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.*

¹³ *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,* ¹⁴ *or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.*

¹⁵ *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men —* ¹⁶ *as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.* ¹⁷ *Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

¹⁸ *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.* ¹⁹ *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.* ²⁰ *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Apostle applies the names of sojourners and pilgrims to the Christians in our text. We Christians are pilgrims on this earth. This

present world is not our true home. We have no continuing city here. We are merely passing through, and our steps are directed to a land which is beyond. We are making for heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven. Heaven is our home.

That we are merely pilgrims on this earth is apparent from the fact that only for a short while we can journey here. We come and go again. One generation is followed by another.

Our earthly possessions we must leave to those who come after us, and the places which we have inhabited are occupied by others when we are gone.

A story is told of a pilgrim who travelled in a foreign land and came to a castle in the evening. He asked the knight who lived in the castle to take him in and let him stay over night. But the man was heartless, and said to the wanderer, "*Go your way; my house is not a tavern!*" The pilgrim said, "*I will go, but allow me three questions. Who lived in this castle before you?*" "*My father,*" was the reply. "*Who lived here before your father?*" "*My grandfather,*" was the answer. "*And who will live here when you are gone?*" "*My son,*" said the knight, "*if God wills it.*" The pilgrim said, "*And still you say, your house is not a tavern when people come and go in this castle?*"

Surely, we have no continuing city here. We are pilgrims.

And *sojourners* says the Apostle. Remember that *sojourners* describes strangers, foreigners, or temporary residents. We Christians enjoy God's beautiful creation as a tourist enjoys the sights which he sees in a foreign land; but we know that this is not our home, and we do not feel as if we would like to build our home here permanently.

There are so many things which seem strange to us, and to which we are not accustomed in this evil world, and the more we love our sweet home in heaven, the more we will desire to be there and say with St. Paul in Philippians 1:23, ²³ ***For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.***

Therefore we Christians must show before the world that we are merely pilgrims and strangers on this earth. We must walk as becoming to our Christian calling.

To this end, we find in our Epistle three rules to be observed. Let us consider, then, with the help of God's Holy Spirit: *Three Rules For Christian Pilgrims*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The First Rule

Abstain From Fleshly Lusts Which War Against The Soul

“Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” This is the first rule for Christian pilgrims.

The reason why we find so many admonitions in the New Testament to abstain from fleshly lusts and to keep from fornication and all manner of uncleanness is, because these were the leading sins among the heathen in those days.

The most shameful things were done among them. And because the Christians separated themselves from the heathen and did not worship their idols, the heathen persecuted them, and would not allow them to meet and to practice their religion.

The Christians had to meet secretly, and the heathen priests spread the report that in their secret meetings the Christians did abominable things. The Apostle therefore says, ¹¹ *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,* ¹² *having your conduct honorable 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.*

This was not said for those Christians alone who lived in the days of the Apostles, but for all Christians. *“Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,”* is a rule which applies to the Christians of the present day with as much force as it did to the followers of Christ in the days of St. Peter.

Has the world changed as to morality? Is not the Sixth Commandment transgressed as much as ever? Are not the most abominable sins committed in secret? Are not there many traps to ensnare the young? Are we not beset with temptations everywhere?

The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — are they not prominent in the world to this day? But what does the Apostle say to the Christians?

He says: *‘Remember that you are strangers and pilgrims in this world; remember that you are in the world, but not of the world; remember that you do not belong to the world, and that therefore you should not identify yourselves with the world.*

Let not the world ensnare you and entrap you into sin. Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, which sear your conscience, rob you of the faith, and make you extremely miserable.’

Here we must note that the unbelieving people of this world find the greatest pleasure in luring Christians into sin. How they rejoice when they succeed in causing a Christian to fall! And how much more noise they make about it when a Christian falls into sin than when any of their own number do a great wrong!

They pass over their own sins with a joke and make light of them; but when a Christian sins, they have a great deal to say about it. And they take occasion from that to denounce Christianity in general, to cast slurs upon the whole Christian community, to brand all Christians as damnable hypocrites, to declare the Christian religion a piece of fraud, and to blaspheme openly.

O how careful we Christians need to be lest we give the unbelieving children of this world any cause for offence! How careful we should be so that they cannot lay any sin to our charge! How careful we should be that our conversation be honest among them, as the Apostle says, *“that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

The day of visitation takes place when God looks upon a person with grace and mercy.¹ Because of God’s grace and mercy we should glorify God by living decent lives.

We should not confirm unbelievers in their unbelief by evil deeds, but rather make an impression upon them by our good works, and eventually lead them to embrace our Christian faith and glorify God. To this end, let us carefully observe the first rule which is directed upon us, that we abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

2. The Second Rule

Submit Yourselves To Every Ordinance Of Man For The Lord’s Sake

The second rule is, ¹³ *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.* In the world we Christians find certain ordinances of men, human institutions of various kinds, laws and regulations which have been set up among people for order's sake.

How are we Christians to regard these ordinances? Are we to say, We have nothing to do with them because we are pilgrims and strangers on earth? No; if you travel in a foreign land, you will not be privileged to do as you please because you are a stranger; you will have to abide by the rules and observe the laws, or you will be fined.

The Apostle says, ¹³ *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.*

¹⁵ *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — ¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*

The Apostle mentions the king and his governors. By the king he means Caesar. Caesar, at that time, was blood thirsty Nero, who did the greatest wrong to the Christians. He accused them of setting fire to the city of Rome which he himself had set on fire, and then persecuted them in the most cruel way.

How easily the early Christians could be led to think that they do not need to obey such cruel rulers, and that they are perfectly right to disregard the laws which these rulers had made and which their governors enforced in the provinces!

Submit yourselves to them, says the Apostle, submit to them for the Lord's sake, because the Lord has given them the power over you. Obey them in all things which are not contrary to God's command. For if they demand of you that you should transgress God's command, you must obey God rather than men.

Obey them because they have the power over you, as we read in Romans 13:1-2, ¹ *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.* ² *Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

This rule applies to us in our land as well as it did to the early Christians. We must submit to the rulers that have been chosen by the majority of the people, whether we have voted for them or not. And we must not use our heavenly citizenship for a pretext to neglect our earthly citizenship.

We must not withdraw from this world's affairs because we are strangers and pilgrims. Much less should we use our liberty with which the Son of God has made us free for a cloak of maliciousness, and do evil things, as, for instance, to dodge taxes, to refuse obedience to the magistrates, and the like. Let us be good citizens and, on our part, do all we can to add to the welfare and prosperity of the land in which we live.

¹⁷ Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. These short sentences are appended to the second rule, and show in what spirit we should submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

Our submission should be with honour for all people, treating them with respect and despising no one, with love, especially to the brotherhood, to those who are our brothers and sisters in the faith, with fear of God, dreading His anger and wrath if we act contrary to His command, and with honour to the king, that is, under our form of government, to the Prime Minister and Premiers, whom we honour also in our church prayer, asking God's blessing upon them every Sunday.

The Apostle does not forget the servants when he speaks of submitting to the ordinances of man. He says, "¹⁸ *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*" Servants will generally do all they can for their masters if they are treated well, but if their masters are harsh, as the Apostle says, that is, perverse, ill-humoured, fault-finding, servants are often tempted to neglect their duty.

If you are employed in any one's service, see that you be faithful in the discharge of your duty. If you are in any state or station of dependency, submit to the ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whose name you profess, and to whom you have pledged yourself as a stranger and pilgrim upon this earth.

3. The Third Rule

If You Are Wronged, Take It Patiently

The third rule is, If you are wronged, take it patiently. The Apostle says, ¹⁹ *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.* ²⁰ *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*

What else may we Christians expect in this evil world than to suffer and to endure grief? We are strangers and pilgrims here. The children of this world do not understand us. They do not understand how we can be so foolish as to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, denying ourselves earthly joys, fearing lest we might sin, and to live in expectation of joys in another world which is to come.

They think that we want to be better than they are, and this puts them against us. What else, then, may we expect than that they hate us, wrong us, abuse us, ridicule us, and persecute us?

But let us be careful that we never give the children of this world any just cause to speak evil against us, and to make us endure grief.

If you profess the faith with the lips, but deny your profession with your life; if you claim to be a Christian, but do the works of an unbeliever; if you defraud your neighbour, lie about others, curse and swear, drink to excess, and like the works of the flesh, how can you blame the children of this world if they despise you, and call you a hypocrite, and bring suffering upon you?

And how can you find comfort then and pride yourself with what you endure? *What credit is it*, says the Apostle, *if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?*

Let us see that we always do well, as the Apostle says, that we walk according to the commandments of the Lord, that we not only abstain from evil deeds, but perform good deeds, worshipping God and loving the neighbour.

Then, if we do suffer, we suffer wrongfully. And if the wrongs which are done to us be ever so great, let us take it patiently. Let us think of our divine Lord who patiently bore all His sufferings when on the cross He died for our sins, who reviled not again when He was reviled, when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Let us not return evil for evil and railing for railing, but observe Christ's command written in Matthew 5:44, *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*

May the Lord, then, grant us all, His grace that as strangers and pilgrims on this earth we observe these three rules, that, first, we abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, that, secondly, we submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, and that, thirdly, we take it patiently if we are wronged.

Then having finished our course on this earth, may we all be received into our eternal home in heaven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Way and the Truth and the Life, blessed and adored, forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Peter John Jude*, Columbus Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945, p109