

Strangers & Pilgrims in this World 1 Peter 1:1-9

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¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ²who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

⁷These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor **when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for **you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

In 1 Peter 2:11-12, Note how Peter addresses the Christian:

¹¹**Dear friends, I urge you, as *aliens* and *strangers* in the world,** to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Origins of Halloween from History.com:

Halloween, celebrated each year on October 31, is a mix of ancient **Celtic practices, Catholic** and **Roman religious rituals** and **European folk traditions** that **blended together** over time to create the holiday we know today. *Straddling the*

line between fall and winter, plenty and paucity and life and death, Halloween is a time of celebration and superstition. Halloween has long been thought of as a day when the dead can return to the earth, and ancient Celts would light bonfires and wear costumes to ward off these roaming ghosts. ***The Celtic holiday of Samhain, the Catholic Halloween period of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day and the Roman festival of Feralia all influenced the modern holiday of Halloween.*** In the 19th century, Halloween began to lose its religious connotation, becoming a more secular community-based children's holiday. Although the superstitions and beliefs surrounding Halloween may have evolved over the years, as the days grow shorter and the nights get colder, people can still look forward to parades, costumes and sweet treats to usher in the winter season.

From Rob Moll's article "Halloween: A Christian Perspective – WSJ – Last Friday

For many churches this week, there won't be any Styrofoam grave stones, skeletons or spooky signs of death and decay. Instead of morbid celebrations of Halloween, there will be innocuously termed—and innocuously decorated—"Harvest Parties." It's Halloween cleaned up, made appropriate even for the youngest congregants.

1) But maybe that's a wrong approach. **Halloween, also known as "All Hallows Eve," and All Saints Day (on Nov. 1) offer a rare opportunity in the Christian calendar to reflect on death.** The holidays were intended to celebrate the communion of the saints, the spiritual unity of all—living and dead—who trust in Christ and **await the eventual resurrection of their bodies.**

2) This is the hope on which Christians stake their lives. But in a culture with deep fears of death and dying, even ***many of the faithful would rather avoid talking about the grave.***

Until the 20th century, the idea of the physical resurrection of our bodies shaped how Christians practiced the rituals of death. They used to see the end of life as the most important opportunity to engage their faith and live fully in the presence of God.

3) **Following the 14th century's Black Plague, Christians developed the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying.** With so many people perishing alone, as family and friends either died or fled, ***an anonymous priest created a book illustrating (with woodcut pictures) the temptations faced by the dying, and how they might be overcome.*** The images allowed illiterate Christians to die with the guidance of the church. *Copies of the book spread throughout Europe and were used for more than a century.*

4) **Martin Luther built on this in his "Sermon on Preparing to Die," in which he advised his followers to trust in the image of Jesus on their deathbeds.** In the 17th

century, Jeremy Taylor, an English Puritan, argued in his book "Holy Dying" that dying well was not intrinsically different than living a good life: "All that a sick and dying man can do is but to exercise those virtues which he before acquired."

5) John Wesley, founder of Methodism, asked any follower who was near death, "Do you see Jesus?" All expected that Jesus would fulfill his promise, in John 14:3, to "come back and take you to be with me."

6) By the 19th century, English and American Methodists called the tradition the "happy" or the "beautiful" death. While death was as unwelcome then as it is today, people knew to expect it, so they prepared themselves throughout their lives.

7) The Christian death is meant to mimic Jesus' own. Before his death, Jesus prepared through prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, offered instruction, and said farewell in the last supper. From the cross, Jesus even arranged his worldly affairs by asking a disciple to care for his elderly mother. He gave up his own life in the hope of defeating death forever. Old tombstones in America's earliest graveyards express this hope: "Here I lie," they say, "awaiting resurrection."

8) In his book "Facing the 'King of Terrors,'" the historian Robert Wells quotes the 1824 obituary of Daniel Vedder, a man in Schenectady, N.Y.: "*His last days exhibited a scene peculiarly striking. . . . He expressed the most cheerful resignation to the will of his heavenly father. . . . It was observed that as he approached the hour of his death, his views of divine subjects [angels and spiritual beings] became increasingly clear.*"

9) Vedder's death illustrated the basic elements of the beautiful death. In it, family, friends and neighbors surrounded the dying person. He asked forgiveness for wrongs he had committed and forgave those of others. He confessed his love for each person and offered last words of advice or encouragement. Lastly, the dying person expressed his belief in life eternal and sometimes even described visions of that future realm. *Loved ones—whether family, neighbors or church friends—were expected to be present as comforters and witnesses.*

10) Contrast this with modern scenes of hospital patients hooked up to machines for months or years, so bruised and broken that some family members can't bear to watch. *The Christian tradition of the art of dying doesn't eliminate these difficult circumstances, but it does offer a framework for end-of-life care,* and goals to guide choices in our final days.

11) *If learning to die must begin during life, there's no better time to start than Halloween and All Saints Day.* There already exist appropriate nursery rhymes and

grammar primers: Think of "Now I lay me down to sleep. . ." Such guidance can lead children toward the knowledge that they too can celebrate the communion of all the saints. - Mr. Moll, a hospice volunteer and the author of "The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come" (IVP Books, 2010), blogs at www.robmoll.com.

The American philosopher **Henry David Thoreau** suggested ***that we should live so simply that if an enemy overtook our town, we could walk out of the gate empty-handed and without anxiety.*** It is a reminder to us as Christians that we should travel light, remembering that this world is not our home.

God bless Bill & Amanda Gates for spending his life now giving away his billions. God bless Warren Buffet for giving his billions to the Bill & Amanda Gates Foundation. They know that they are going to die and they know their wealth is far, far, more than a wise person would leave his children. They know the world is hurting and can use all the help it can receive.

1. Shortly before he died, King David prayed, "We are aliens and pilgrims before you" (**1 Chronicles 29:15**).
2. In discussing Old Testament heroes, the writer of **Hebrews 11:13** called them "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." He said they desired a better country and were looking for a city that God had prepared for them (**verse 16**); therefore God was not ashamed to be called their God.

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; ***they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.*** And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

¹⁴**People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.**

¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

¹⁶**Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.** Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

3. The Bible says, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." (**1 Peter 2:11**)

“Sojourners” – *paroikos* - having a *home near*.—foreigner, sojourn, stranger.

“Pilgrims” – *parepidēmos* – an alien alongside, that is, a resident foreigner:— pilgrim, stranger.

Keep Your Eye on the Ball – 1 Peter 1:13

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Illustration

"Keep your eye on the ball" has its roots in baseball, but also applies to Navy aviators as they approach an aircraft carrier for a landing--the "ball" being a glowing light that helps them line up and land safely on a pitching carrier deck. A small group from 3 different churches had dinner last Friday evening at Captain's Cap Restaurant. And, I listened with great interest as one of the guest spoke of his time in the Navy working on an aircraft carrier unhooking the hook that catches the plane. It was fascinating. He spoke about those planes coming in. Talk about "focus", those pilots and those hands on deck must be highly focused. That is the way we are to be about the promised hope we have in Christ. **We don't belong here. We are "strangers and pilgrims" down here.**

"Get your head in the game" is a similar exhortation--shouted by coaches to "wake up" drowsy players.

These and other similar sayings have the same purpose--to force active, intelligent awareness of one's surroundings and not to get lulled into complacency. While using different language, the New Testament certainly endorses that goal from a spiritual perspective.

Paul said to the Philippians 3:13-14

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Take stock. Take action. And take heart! God blesses wisdom and diligence in every area, including our knowledge that one day we are going to be pulled out of our earthly home to be translated into our Heavenly home glory.

“True conversion gives a man security, but it does not allow him to leave off being watchful.” – C. H. Spurgeon

- 4. We should prayerfully follow current events and respond as wisely as possible to the events of this life. But always remember--*this world is not our home; we're just "a passing through."***

When you hurt so bad that you prefer to just die and go be with the Lord, you know that you are a 'stranger and sojourner' down here.

When you are standing by the graveyard of a loved one and know that one day you will see them again you know that you are a 'stranger and sojourner' down here.

"Christians are not citizens of earth trying to get to heaven but citizens of heaven making their way through this world." - Vance Havner