

Excellent Aliens

I Peter 2:11-25

Main Idea: Because we belong to Jesus who Himself chose submission, our submission to those in authority brings Him eternal glory

Back in the late 1950s and the 60s, with the space program in its infancy, any talk about aliens seemed to focus on some unknown extraterrestrial creature that although undetected, was almost certainly here on earth, and most probably with nefarious motives! Other than curiosity, fear was the emotion that was usually generated when people would talk about aliens.

But this morning, we are going to be looking at "excellent aliens" described by the Apostle Peter in I Peter 2:11-25. The words translated "aliens and strangers" in verse 11 in the NASB, are rendered as "strangers and pilgrims" in the KJV; "temporary residents and foreigners" in the NLT; "foreigners and exiles" in the NIV; and "sojourners and exiles" in the ESV. So the aliens that Peter is referring to are definitely here on this earth, and I want to let you in on a little secret...THEY are US!

The focus in our Scripture text this morning is on God's will that we, His people, live excellent lives before those who are not His people. Let's read I Peter 2:11-25 together and see what God says about how "excellent aliens" should behave!

I Peter 2:11-25 NASB

LEADER

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

ALL

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

ALL

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

LEADER

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

*WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;
and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

ALL

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

An alien is a person from a different racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic group in contrast to a “native born” person. Since I grew up as an American in Latin America and in North America, I’ve always felt pretty much at home anywhere in the Americas. But since I traveled to Asia and Africa, I’ve come to understand what it means to be an alien! I had a terribly hard time understanding anything from the language and I certainly didn’t understand the cultural nuances of conversation and interaction around me.

In biblical times, people were often compelled by something like famine, persecution, or war, to emigrate to other countries where they would become resident aliens. An example of this can be found in Ruth 1:1 with Elimelech and Naomi moving to Moab. And in the story of Lot in Genesis 19:9, the men of Gomorrah were complaining that Lot came into the city as an alien and then started to act as a judge.

A less permanent resident would be known as a “stranger”. But aliens and strangers were always outsiders in some sense, not really fitting in completely with the culture and life around them. The “aliens” receiving this letter were out in foreign nations and the main reason that they didn’t fit in was because they, just like us if we belong to Jesus Christ, were first of all citizens of heaven.

This morning we want to examine the three things Peter has to say to us as aliens and strangers in a foreign land. And then we will look at the One who left us an example to follow in His steps. All the way through this intensely practical message, we want to think about how this all applies to us in our everyday life. So let’s look at verses 11 and 12 again.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Last week we saw that when in faith we come to Jesus as the Living Stone, God joins us to Him so that we receive His life and become living stones. He makes us the people of God and a holy priesthood to offer up acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ. We are radically changed, born again, begotten to a living hope. We became citizens of heaven, and because we are now living Christ’s life, our language and our culture radically change. We are being transformed into His likeness, becoming less and less like the world that we live in. Even our ethnicity changed as we were begotten as children of God. Now we are from a different family. We are truly aliens! But the Apostle Peter is going to give us practical instruction about living as excellent aliens.

First of all he tells us to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. At first glance it seems that the Apostle Peter is speaking about moral purity, and I’m sure that is included. But the word “lust” speaks to strong, almost overpowering desires in every area of life. In the area of sexual

morality, that definition certainly applies. But our flesh also strongly desires comfort, a sense of provision and security, recognition from others, etc.

Peter says to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. If any of these things become our priority, if they take the place of the Lord God, they pull our soul down. We are a holy people, set apart for Him! So as aliens and strangers, don't let any of those desires which rule the lives of the citizens of this world around, you govern your lives. The things that motivate them and rule their lives should be only secondary considerations for you.

Then Peter says we are to keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles, a term figuratively used here to describe the world's citizens, those who are outside the community of God. The reason that you live this way is not to make your way easier in the world but rather that people will see Christ's life in you and glorify God in the day that Jesus returns! Your excellent behavior as an alien residing in the world will have eternal value!

Verses 13-17 give us practical instruction about how to keep our behavior excellent among this world's citizens. We are to submit to those in human authority over us. Notice the words that Peter uses. "Every human institution..." "A king as the one in authority..." "Governors as sent by the king..."

The text would make it seem that these are mere human beings put by others into these positions of authority presumably by other human beings, yet we, God's people who are resident aliens, are instructed to submit to them. That's hard to do!

I know what you might be thinking...there is the end to verse 14 coming up. Let's read that. These governors are sent by the king *"...for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right."*

Surely, you might think, this lets me off the hook because the government over me is often pushing what is evil. For instance, God instituted marriage between one man and one woman. The government would force a perversion of God's design on me and on my kids and my church! They also want to use my tax money to fund abortions, a taking of life that I want no part of, and that God absolutely condemns. They persecute the people of God and give sanctuary to those who worship false gods. They want to control the education of my children and grandchildren during their impressionable years to turn them from God and conform them to their own standards. Surely God would not have me be submissive.

I want to get really practical here. It is very important that you have this testimony of submissiveness. Consider that when Peter wrote this, his civil authorities were subjects of the king, Nero who was in power in Rome from 54-68 AD. Nero was a terrible human being, even killing his own mother to consolidate his power. His immorality and depravity were legendary. His rule was tyrannical. Some historians even think the great fire of Rome was started by Nero to clear away part of the city for the great palatial complex that he wanted to build.

But Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, seizing them and burning them alive in the colosseum in a display of horrible cruelty. His extravagance and his cruel dominion were perpetuated throughout the Roman provinces over all the known world by the governors that he appointed. And it is in that context that Peter says to submit to every human institution.

Let me take a short rabbit trail this morning and talk in practical terms about our relationship to the American government today. Should we always submit to civil authority over us? We obviously cannot submit when they ask us to personally participate in something that is contrary to what God has instructed us. The Apostle Peter himself, along with John, said to the authorities in Acts 4:19 who were trying to silence their witness to the resurrection of Jesus, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge. We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."* You see, Jesus told them they were to be witnesses to His resurrection. Therefore they could not submit to the human authorities and be quiet about it!

As Christians we need to speak up unequivocally for justice and truth. And as Americans, we have the immense privilege and the responsibility of speaking up and voting for representation in our government. But Scriptures make it plain that our debate should be reasoned and orderly, not strident and denigrating. A chanting or shouting mob trying to wield political weight has no place in orderly Christian conduct.

We should always stand for righteousness, no matter what the consequences. No matter how much our society changes standards, we are to hold to Scriptural definitions and practices. And as Christians we should be aware that we will pay a price for remaining true to God. Yet we need to obey God rather than man!

But there are many grey areas where it is not quite so clear, and about which Christians often disagree. An example would be paying taxes when we know some of them are used to pay for abortions. We have a great example in Jesus though, when in Matt. 17:24-27, we see Jesus reasoning with Peter, indicating that He, the Lord Himself, should be exempt from paying the temple tax.

But notice what He said in verse 27. *"However, we don't want to offend them, so go down to the lake and throw in a line. Open the mouth of the first fish you catch, and you will find a large silver coin. Take it and pay the tax for both of us."*

Jesus stood for righteousness. He never compromised with sin. Yet the King of kings and Lord of lords maintained a testimony of voluntary submission to the authorities over whom He was sovereign. And the temple leaders to whom He paid the tax were absolutely corrupt, bringing reproach on God. Notice that Jesus didn't even use the occasion to bring that up! Because we belong to Jesus who Himself chose submission, our submission to those in authority brings Him eternal glory.

Peter says in verses 15-17 of our text, *"For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."*

God wants us to have the testimony of a basic attitude of submission to authority rather than assuming an adversarial posture which brings dishonor upon Him. Compliance, not antagonism should characterize us. Submission to human authority will give testimony to our allegiance to God more than will belligerence. We submit because we choose to submit to God and serve Him. We should not belittle people but treat them with honor. We should love our fellow Christians as we fear God and honor civil authorities.

In verse 18-20, Peter moves into the relationship between servants and masters. It is remarkable that Peter doesn't delve into the matter of whether God is against or in favor of one human being owning another in a practical sense. It is not that Scripture doesn't have anything to say about the institution of slavery. In fact, Christians like William Wilberforce took the lead in abolishing slavery. But in these verses there is something that the Holy Spirit indicates is more important than setting a human institution like slavery straight.

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."

To be freed from servitude, even if the master was cruel, was not the ultimate goal of a Christian servant's life. Rather, he wanted to find favor with God in the way he patiently bore up under injustice perpetrated upon him. The Apostle Paul, in I Cor. 7:20-21 (NLT), explains, *"Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave."*

Let me paraphrase that into 2017 language for you. "If you have an unreasonable boss today who mistreats you, don't get all upset about it. If you can get another job, do that. Remember that you are really serving Christ and no matter how unreasonably your boss treats you, Jesus is the One who lifts your burden. And if you get a job with a reasonable boss, you will still be serving Jesus!"

Peter then sets up a scenario of you taking matters in your own hands and trying to get justice by underserving your boss. If you are sinning by not doing an excellent job and then have harsh treatment heaped on you, even if you endure with patience, there is no reward. Deserved suffering doesn't incur any credit from God

But if you do what is right, serving well, doing excellent work, and you suffer patiently the verbal abuse and unjust treatment, that finds favor with God. Legitimate suffering under a godly conscience for doing what is good brings favor from God

One of my sisters gave me a quote from William James, a man that normally I would hesitate to quote. But I thought that what he had to say was interesting. "Things are not as they are, but as we are." I had to think a little bit to wrap my mind around it, but I do see his point. Do you see

yourself as an abused slave? That is what you are. Do you see yourself as free because you choose to be a slave to Christ? Then you are free! What difference does your attitude make? It makes a difference whether or not you can submit for Christ's sake. In God's economy, how I react to my circumstances is much more eternally significant than my circumstances.

But this all begs the question, "Why do we choose submission?" Look at Peter's answer in verse 21. *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."* This is what we have been called to! We are called to follow Him!

What was His example? Verses 22-23 say that Jesus did no wrong. Then when He was reviled, He didn't revile in return. When He was despised, He didn't despise in return. He never threatened revenge on anyone when He was insulted and mistreated. Rather, *"He kept entrusting Himself to the one who judges righteously."*

"...kept entrusting" speaks to continuous action. What did that look like? As He was reviled and buffeted on the road to Calvary, with every blow and every word of abuse, with every lash of the whip and every thorn that pressed into His head, Jesus had to again leave justice to the One who always judges justly. That is how we are to go through mistreatment in our lives, entrusting ourselves day after day and moment after moment to God who judges righteously.

In the last two verses, 24 and 25, Peter reminds us of how we got to be who we are. Remember, we have been born again to a living hope and an eternal inheritance. We have been made a holy people and living stones with Jesus' life in us!

We are the ones who have been saved from God's wrath against sin because Jesus submitted to death on the cross. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."*

We are called Christians because we have Jesus' life in us! Let us live life submitted to God for His glory, as we follow Jesus!

Excellent Aliens

I Peter 2:11-25

Main Idea: Because we belong to Jesus who Himself chose submission, our submission to those in authority brings Him eternal glory

Understanding aliens

Abstaining from fleshly lusts

Keeping your behavior excellent

V 13-17 – Submitting to human authority

V 18-20 – Submitting as servants

Following Jesus, our example of submission