

Holiness of Living as Strangers in this World

Colossians 1:1-17

Southern Oklahoma Chinese Baptist Church, October 22, 2006

Introduction: A greeting to the 'strangers in the world'

If you turn your Bible to I Peter 1:1, you will read an interesting greeting from Peter to the believers in Colosse: *1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, **strangers in the world**, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the knowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling of His blood.* In another words, as God's chosen people, we are to live like 'strangers' in this world!

Most Americans do not know what it really means to live as a stranger, much less how living the life of stranger relates to holiness. In fact, most American Christians cannot decipher between Christianity and American cultural Christianity. Few have lived outside America where no matter what they do or say -- even if they become fluent in the other language(s), they will forever stand out (for good or bad). Because of different perspectives, experiences, accents, and sometimes physical differences, strangers will forever be distinguished from the norm. (Illustration: my best friend's 'big nose' sketch as ending to all his letters)

The unique experience of us, Asian-Americans, living in America through the eyes of believers living in foreign lands, distinguishes ourselves from the cultural norm. Again, not just because of our physical appearances, rather our belief system as Christians. And I believe that there is a special calling from God for us as 'foreigners' or 'strangers' coming to live in this land with a special purpose - to help bring this American culture back to a whole new focus on holiness relating to God's "strangers in the world."

(Let's pray)

Colossians 3 (Rules for Holy Living)

*1Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your **hearts** on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your **minds** on things above, not on earthly things. 3For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

5Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

I. Where do we set our **hearts** and **minds**? (v. 1-7) - on things above

What separates us from the world is Christ in us – that completely change our perspectives on thought (set your hearts and minds on things above) and attitude towards living on earth. The world looks at our *outside*, but God look at our *inside*. We have a whole new perspective on life in that though we live in this world, like everybody else, believers or non believers, we're **IN** this world, but we are not **OF** this world. We are citizens of heaven, traveling through this earth as 'strangers'.

- The world pursues earthly life – and LONG earthly life – 'tens and thousands of years old' a special name for Chinese emperors. Some spent all their life seeking panacea, a medicine to miraculously cure all disease thus living forever. Without God, people have fear to die, because after death, there is no more. Christians, on the contrary, choose to die (spiritually) daily. We die to our early desires, and we are not afraid of death because after that is life, there is something above and beyond this 70 or 80 years of life, which we call ETERNAL LIFE. (Death can be a celebration of next life – illustration) What is the 'things above' in life? Christians have hope, a life lot longer than 'Ten Thousand years'..
- The world peruses 'MONEY' – Without much explanation, people all know how powerful money's influence can be. I can use some but I don't trade my life for pleasures with it. Christians have this 'strange' behavior of giving a lot of money away. Some give 10%, some

gives even more towards special causes, like supporting the missionaries and building program. They believe that 90% is greater than 100%. They don't get their math right! Why do they do this? Because there is something above the mere provision of money from God – he wants us to use the money for His glory! (Help penniless stranger get on greyhound bus to somewhere near New York Greyhound lines #2947\$153.50. Not to recount the number of times I brought people to gas station or somewhere to fill their cars with gas and their stomachs with food.)

- The world pursues 'FAME' - In the years past, I've dealt with more drug addicted, alcoholic, mentally disordered, broken families, confused relationships, - people who need the Lord outside of church environment than the number of people within the four church walls. Instead of pursuing fame and popularity, making 'heroes' out of ourselves, there is something above we can focus on – life impact, meeting the needs of our neighbor, caring for the least as if doing it for the Lord!

Col. 3:8-14 *8But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and **filthy language from your lips**. 9Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and **dearly loved, clothe** yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

II. How do these strangers deal with each other? (v. 8-14) rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language

Christians seem to always smile at each other, slow to anger and quick to forgive. They're compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient. They are so different from this world! But, sometimes we could be carrying a wrong ARMS (Anger, Rage, Malice, and Slander), if we're not careful about what the world is offering us.

- **Anger** is something that builds within us. And if people didn't respond the way we expected, we are angry. This anger begins to boil within us and eat away at our defenses.
- **Rage** is the boiling over of anger. It is often seen in a quick-tempered person. Rage is when we "lose control". We "fly off the handle". Rage always leaves casualties in its wake.
- **Malice** is the bitterness that seeks to hurt another. It causes us to say hurtful things. It leads us to a viciousness of mind, act like a "self-appointed" critic and judge to set everyone else straight.
- **Slander** follows suit. This is hurtful speech that defames a person's character. It is often speaking hurtful or distorted truth to make another look bad.

This must be important enough because similar statement is repeated in I Peter 2:1 Eph. 4:31 and so a summary in Ephesians 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome **talk** come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

We ought to give careful thought concerning the words we use. It is imperative that our speech be in keeping with God's standard and not the world's! Sometimes, a simple 'No' response to a hard work you have done for the ministry can be discouraging enough for one to continue meaningful ministry. Other times, we responded to our brothers and sisters in worldly way, when spiritual requirement is clear that we must be understanding and accepting.

You may say 'I was hurt because of someone's speech', or you may realize that 'I hurt someone by an unwholesome talk'. I didn't mean to, but somehow I did. Romans 7:19 "For what I do is

not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”— that is why we must ‘bear with each other’.

There is a way for reconciliation - THE MEANING and POWER of FORGIVENESS

Greek *Aphiemi* = To set free, send away; to cancel the debt; to remit; to totally remove; thus, never be liable for the obligation again. (1 John 1:9) *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

We can almost plug Colossians 2:13-15 in the text right after Colossians 3:10 (Col 2:13-14)
*13When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15And having **diSARM**ed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*

Why can the Christians do it? ‘dearly loved’ – some times we became weary, too. We need to be recharged, and re-experience the love of God. And what is amazing is that God is ALWAYS READY as if he is standing right next to us every single moment, opening up his arms to receive us if WE WOULD JUST THROW OURSELVES TO HIM. We cannot do all of these ‘strange’ things until we learn to be recharged by God’s love. And you do so by daily prayers, Bible reading, fellowship and your own worship!

Col. 3:15-17 *15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17And whatever you do, whether in **word** or **deed**, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

‘love one another for who they **ARE**, not what they **DO** – i.,e., if one day you quit everything you do for the church or your friends, you ought to be loved exact same way as you ARE being a brother in the Lord.

III. What do these strangers NOT do? What do they DO? (v. 15-17)

- *Let Christ rule their hearts (lives) (v. 15)* holiness – means set apart for God (sanctified I Peter 1:1), purity (Christ-likeness) repentance, full of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (v. 12) – confess and turn from sin and agree to follow God’s way
- *Teach and admonish one another (v. 16)*
Our church used your Chinese translation of ‘Returning to Holiness’ to encourage believers united in persistent, urgent prayer, humble **repentance**, and personal spiritual cleansing. The result was spiritual renewal that released the power and presence of God in mighty outpourings of the Holy Spirit that spill throughout members in TIBC.
- *Sing psalms, ... (v. 16)* Heart of worship –

Conclusion- *be holy - I Peter 1: 16for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 17Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, **live your lives as strangers** here in reverent fear. . Perhaps, we have live no differently than the world. But God’s calling is for us to be the ‘strangers’. If you wish to be one, let’s pray together for Him to strengthen us so we can turn back to the holiness of living as ‘strangers in this world’.*

Invitation

Awareness that sin is against God – remember the **earthly and dreadful** nature of sin. The word is decaying, and morality. Admit that we need God

Confess sin – Admit to God we were wrong in old, worldly way. **Repent of sin** – Ask God’s forgiveness, turn from the sin and renew your commitment to follow God