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Sojourners & Pilgrims

- by Ed Brand

Peter urges saints to regard themselves as sojourners and pilgrims. A sojourner is one who lives among aliens. Pilgrims live in a strange place, away from one's own people. Hostility is injected into this alien, strange place by the phrase, which war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11). He says the present dwelling place of Christians is in a strange, hostile land; a land where danger lurks in the form of fleshly lusts.

I know Americans who live abroad. They are literally sojourners. They are living in a country of which they are not native. The customs there are different from their homeland. Most of them live in relative safety from governmental persecution, but some do not. There is actual danger of deportation or threat of harassment while they live there. A remarkable thing about these people: they volunteered to live in this environment because they believe their being there would be helpful to the cause of Jesus. Living there is generally more rigorous and less comfortable than living in the USA. They have not forgotten their homeland and look forward to the time they can return.

Christians are living in a land which is not theirs and which is inhabited by people and influences which are foreign to them. How easy it is to forget that we are just pilgrims passing through. We are like Abraham who dwelled in tents (only a temporary home) while he traveled in search of the city which hath foundations (Heb. 11:9-10). He was incessantly looking for this permanent dwelling place.

The world is out to make us citizens. Its efforts, sometimes subtle, sometimes bold, are to make us feel at home here. We need to slip into something more comfortable. Since we are going to be here for a while we ought to at least enjoy being here. Don't be so uptight.

I'm afraid many saints are vulnerable to this persuasive song the world sings. Some have concentrated so hard on the here and now that the there and then have all but been forgotten. We are surrounded with the gadgets of culture which dazzle and amaze our eyes and minds. The popular media praise modern paganism and denounce Christians with convictions as right-wing fanatics and bigots. Surely we do not want to be either fanatics or bigots. The only way to be relieved of those names is to cease opposition to the world's agenda, be silent and lay down our arms.

Dear brethren, when we become sophisticated and are comfortable in our surroundings, the enemy has won. Our lips will be silenced in opposition to wrong and closed for use to convert others. Our numbers will dwindle, our influence lessen, until we are gone. Vanished! Unless we remain conscious to the designations of sojourners and pilgrims and act consistently with the meaning of those terms.

GREATER VOICE

by Andy Diestelkamp

The technology of social media has given *greater voice* to the masses while simultaneously insulating us from face-to-face realities. This has emboldened many to "come out" with their various identity crises with the support of and under the protection of a mob of virtual friends who will not only validate their choices but defensively rail against those who dare to question their choices and/or challenge their reasoning.

However, *greater voice* is a good thing *only* if it has ears to hear. Contrary to the biblical admonition, many are swift to speak, swift to wrath, and slow to hear (cf. Js. 1:19). This is not just a problem on the part of those who are “coming out” but also on the part of those who oppose them. While the worldly-wise nonsensically oppose opposition as unloving hate speech, those opposed to such worldly wisdom too often foolishly resort to worldly methods of opposition, forgetting that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Paul’s reminder is not just a condemnation of resorting to the extreme of physical violence but includes *how* we engage those in error with our words. While the reasoning of those who reject God and His Word can be frustrating and infuriating, our replies need to be characterized by patient, long-suffering grace as exemplified by Jesus rather than in the manner of political leftists or rightists.

One of the advantages of the *greater voice* given to the common man is an exposure to a multitude of perspectives. Looking at things through different lenses or walking a mile in another man’s shoes are positive metaphors suggesting that we all still have more to learn from which we can benefit. Interaction with cultures other than the one of our own nativity can greatly affect our perspective on things. One of the dangers of “American exceptionalism” is the lack of objectivity that often comes with such pride. Indeed, for the Christian, any national or ethnic culture must ultimately submit to the culture of Christ and not vice versa (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Yet, one of the disadvantages of the *greater voice* for so many is the confusion that often results when a multitude of diverse perspectives clash. The cacophony of voices can be overwhelming to the point of two extreme reactions: we stop listening to opposing views altogether, or we become so open-minded that our brains fall out. There’s a better place between the alleged bliss of ignorance and the alleged freedom of irrationality; and it is not found in worldly media, regardless of how fair and balanced it claims to be. It is only found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and is thus the *divine voice* to which our ears ought to be bent and tuned. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (10:27). “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). “Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice” (18:37). “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). So let us filter the competing and confusing voices of this world through Jesus Christ and the words of His apostles and prophets. Let us find our identity in Christ alone and “come out” from the world “lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (18:4). Let us have ears to hear the greater and *greatest voice*, Jesus Christ.

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