

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## In the world - not of it: Citizens of Heaven - pilgrims on earth

*Strangers and pilgrims here below,  
This earth, we know, is not our place;  
We hasten through this vale of woe,  
And, restless to behold Thy face,*

*Swift to our heavenly country move,  
Our everlasting home above.  
We've no abiding city here,  
But seek a city out of sight;*

*Thither our steady course we steer,  
Aspiring to the plains of light,  
Jerusalem, the saints' abode,  
Whose founder is the living God.*

These verses by Charles Wesley outline the truth that, as Christians, we are not citizens of earth but citizens of heaven. In John 17:6 the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded to have said in a prayer to the Father, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." It reminds us that those who trust in Christ are people who have been called out from this world. They now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He went on to pray in verses 14-19: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

Here, the Son of God notes that the world rejected His followers because they were different. Their manner of life is that which reveals that they are heavenly in character. On 21 July 1969, the American, Neil Armstrong, became the first man to walk on the Moon. As he put his left foot down first Armstrong declared: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." He went on to describe the surface as being like powdered charcoal. The astronaut was in an environment alien to him. For that reason, he was clothed in a space suit that provided a personal life-sustaining environment. Furthermore, he had a radio link with his home base. Hence, although he was on the moon, he was not "of it".

So it is with Christians here in this world. Spiritually, they are not of it. Their old selves have been crucified with Christ. (Galatians 2:20). That is the crux of the matter. The lives of Christians are dependent upon faith in Christ who gives them a totally new kind of life – one like His own. So the lives of every believer are like hand-written letters - every page revealing Christ in some way. Paul puts this beautifully when writing to the believers in Corinth: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

Speaking of Christians, the apostle Paul wrote the following words about himself and the Ephesian Christians before their conversion: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:3). Yes, as unbelievers, they had lived lives marked by selfishness - self-aggrandisement, self-gratification and self-satisfaction. It is from this old self that Christians have been called. Paul demands that the change in our natures should be clearly seen. He wrote to the Ephesian Christians: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Peter, when writing of Christian Jews who had been scattered because of persecution, describes them as strangers and pilgrims in this world. As such, he encourages them to abstain from fleshly cravings, which war against the soul

(1 Peter 2:11). Here the word used for “strangers” means “sojourners” or, literally, “beside the dwelling”. Therefore, a sojourner is someone who has left his homeland to live elsewhere on a temporary basis. He does not have the right to citizenship and he is generally classed as unacceptable to the native inhabitants.

Christians are taught that their home is heaven. So they are always ready to move on heavenwards to the Father’s home on high. While waiting, they keep themselves separate. Christians are set apart (sanctified) for the possession, pleasure and purposes of God. They are ready to move off at a moment’s notice. Therefore, they detach themselves from the fads, fashions, opinions and pleasures of this world and seek to walk with God following the culture, beliefs and values set out in the New Testament.

If the word “sojourner” deals with the place, then the word “pilgrim” emphasises relationships. We read: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ...” (Philippians 3:20). In this verse, the word “conversation” means “community” or “citizenship”. The relationships and rights of Christians are in heaven. So, as pilgrims, Christians do not yoke themselves with unbelievers. They are a separate community of people. Their *close* partnerships while here on earth are to be formed with other Christians. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:14: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” One example of such a relationship is that of marriage. Are you a Christian intending to marry an unbeliever? God’s word tells you not to take that course, no matter how much you may love your partner. Rather, in the will of God, seek out one who is a Christian. Sometimes the word of God is sweet to the taste, but bitter to the stomach. However, this also relates to partnerships in business and other areas of life also. Therefore, the pilgrim is in a living relationship with God and the intimacy of that relationship will be fully revealed when Christ comes to take believers to be with Himself in glory.

In Hebrews 11:13, we read of some Old Testament believers who were marked out as strangers and pilgrims. The verse states: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Those who died in faith are found in verse 9 of the chapter. They include: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. Although they had received the verbal promises of God, they never saw those promises fulfilled. Nonetheless, they implicitly trusted the God who made them, and embraced them as a reality, so classing themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

An example of this is found in Genesis 23:2-4 where Abraham realises that he is a guest in a foreign land and only dwelling in that place temporarily. As such, he seeks permission from the sons of Heth to bury his wife’s body. Furthermore, it is also written of Abraham, the friend of God, that he looked for a city which has foundations and whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham had a God-given objective. He was informed of the purposes of his Lord. He was a true pilgrim.

In Ephesians 2:12, the apostle Paul wrote outlines the position of the Ephesian Christians before their conversion: He showed them that they were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. That is to say, they did not have a share or part in Israel. He went on to say that they were foreign to the promises of God that had been made to that nation.

The word used by Paul for “strangers” is different to Peter’s. It is the Greek word “*xenos*” from which we derive the word “xenophobia” which means “a fear of strangers”. This emphasises that strangers were seen as being different to the normal inhabitants. Christians ought to be seen to be different as they live out their lives. Paul went on to tell the Ephesians that they were no longer strangers and foreigners to one another, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Jew and Gentile believers now shared the blessing of God together in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had the rights of citizens of heaven and were part of God’s family. The dividing wall that had stood for so long between Jew and Gentile had been broken down through the work of Christ.

So what are the heavenly rights that Christians have? Well, we read in John 1:12 that they are sons (or, better, children) of God, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name...” Christians are made the children of God through new birth. As children they partake of the divine nature and are dependent upon God. They are also classed as “sons” by adoption, expressing the dignity and privilege they have before God. Hence, they are accountable to God in undertaking their responsibilities.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 the apostle Paul writes: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ ...” An ambassador is a senior diplomat representing his king or government in foreign states. The apostle uses the word apostolic “we” to show that the apostles and prophets of the early church were active in this role in preaching the Gospel of Christ. Coupling this with the fact that they were citizens of heaven, they were clearly representing God upon earth. They had the full authority of the Lord to express His mind and take care of His interests in His absence.

To a lesser degree, all Christians are able to represent God in their witness. Unlike, the apostles and prophets their words are not God-breathed (inspired by God), but they do have the Holy Scriptures which are. So Christians are, on

the one hand, subject to the rule of God as citizens of heaven but, on the other, are given the responsibility to represent Him while here on earth. This should be seen in their:

- Worship
- Walk (that is, their manner of life which is also represented by the word “conversation” in the Bible);
- Witness;
- Warfare; and
- Work.

In John 4 the Lord Jesus Christ outlines the basis for Christian worship in a conversation with a Samaritan woman. He said to her, “...The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The word used for worship literally means “to kiss the hand toward.” To do this the worshipper bows, thus physically owning the worth of the person before him/her. Worship is a specific act. Some people say that the giving of alms is worship. It may be a measure of the love we have for God, but it is not, strictly speaking, worship. Worship is an expression of our appreciation and apprehension of the wonder of the person who is its object. We have seen that Christians are both strangers and pilgrims. It must seem quite abnormal for an unbeliever to understand the act of worship. Nonetheless, with the emphasis on relationships, the worship of God is fundamental to the pilgrim.

The Lord then goes on to speak of the Father as the object of worship. This is a father in the parental sense. It is the same word that Jesus used later when He said to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). The Lord was introducing the disciples to a new relationship. Individually, as children, they could call God their Father. This was the same Father whom the Lord Jesus revealed. In Matthew 11:27 He states: “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” The Father who cares for the individual sparrow, cares perfectly for us. The Father who feeds the raven, hears our prayers and provides for us. The Father who raised the Lord Jesus from among the dead is the same Person who protects us. The Father who sent the Spirit to indwell us, trains and disciplines us. The Father who sent the Son of His love to die for us, has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance in light. All that God is, the Father is! The greatness of His love and faithfulness demand that He is both revered and adored.

The true worshipper of the Father, worships in spirit and in truth. Because God is spirit, the Christian needs no special building, no religious artefact and no ritual to aid his worship. He worships from the heart and in accordance to the truth found in the word of God. Furthermore, he does this as prompted by the Holy Spirit also (see Philipians 3:3). Of course, worship may be private and public. It may rise from posture, prayer or song (silent or audible).

The walk (or manner of life) of a Christian should be like that of Christ. In Ephesians 5:2 we read: “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” Love is that nature that always seeks the best for the good of its object. In its fullest measure, it is sacrificial. Therefore, Christians who truly love may be called to die for others, especially fellow believers. Christ has shown the greatest of all love because He gave up His life for those who were His enemies.

Love also permeates the fruit of the Spirit of God. In Galatians 5:22-23 we find it is placed first: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” These nine things should mark Christian lives.

If we look through the New Testament, we can find many facets to the Christian walk. First, it should be consistent with the Gospel of Christ. The Christian walk must be in accordance with the truth of God’s word and, as a result, they should be standing fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith.

Fellow Christians, the meekness mentioned is not weakness! Moses was once classed as the meekest man on earth; but he proved to be a great leader for God. If ever there was a day to stand fast for Christ, it is today. Our liberty is being eroded and God’s principles for our society are being abandoned. Members of government, who should be representing Him, are allowing all sorts of wickedness to prevail in the name of equality or human rights. It is time for our voices to be heard! It is time for Christian men and women in government to speak out or to come away from that which is promoting ungodliness. It seems that there is no longer a political party in this land that will take a stand on moral matters. Its absence will lead to increasing anarchy and wide-spread disease.

Second, there is honesty. In a day when lying is common and there is little honour among men, pilfering and stealing are also prevalent. The Christian’s life should be an honest one.

Third, it should be full of good works. A good work is a selfless work done in the will of God to the benefit of others with God receiving the glory. Dorcas was full of good works. She made clothes for the poor.

Fourth, it should be a life of generosity. Today, in the Western World, covetousness reigns. Christians are not to strongly desire the things they see others possessing, but are to work with their own hands in order to be able to give to the needy or the Lord's work.

Finally, their lives are to be pure or chaste. They are to be faithful to their husbands and wives. Sexual relations are to be maintained in marriage and not before marriage. There is no room for fornication of any kind. The Bible teaches that things like the practice of homosexuality are shameful (Romans 1:27). Such acts would be classed among those in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 where those practising them have no part in the kingdom of God. Furthermore, if a Christian were to behave constantly in such an immoral way, then he would be put out of the church until full repentance has been shown and completely shunned by fellow believers (read 1 Corinthians 5).

The witness of the Christians is vital. The commission given by Jesus to the apostles in Matthew 28:19-20 applies to Christians today: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." Not only should believers show Christ in their walk, but also in their talk. So whether they witness by writing, sign language or speech, the name of Gospel of Christ is to be proclaimed. The early Christians not only proclaimed the Gospel, but also communicated it in everyday conversation.

Another part of the Christian life is warfare. Not a physical warfare, but a spiritual one. Ephesians 6:12 states: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." So the Christian is commanded to put on the whole armour of God. The items of the suit include: the assurance of salvation, the display of righteousness, the defence of faith, the labour of truth, the message of peace, the wielding of the word of God and prayer. These things ensure that the Christian will stand in an evil time such as that in which we live today.

Lastly, the Christian is to work for God. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of a worker. At the age of twelve, He had to be about His Father's business. This is emphasised in John 4:34 where He says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." In John 17:4, He says to His Father: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He went about doing good, but that was only a small part of the work. He had to endure the cross if God's purposes for mankind were to be fulfilled!

The apostle Paul encourages believers to work. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, he writes: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The Lord's work is always fruitful and we should do it cheerfully and with all our might.

The Thessalonian believers were commended for their "work of faith". This is a selfless work done in the will of God and to the glory of God. This means that the Lord's servants must discover the will of God and submit to that will. This may only be achieved through personal prayer and study of God's word – communion! William Meyer once wrote the following:

*There's a work for Jesus  
Ready at your hand,  
'Tis a task the Master  
Just for you has planned;*

*Haste to do His bidding,  
Yield Him service true;  
There's a work for Jesus,  
None but you can do.*

They were also marked by the "labour of love". This is the translation of the love of God into constant toil by Christians in order that men might be blessed. It is seen in the unceasing toil of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of others. His love for men and for God led Him to the cross and its curse. It is also expressed through Paul and his fellows: "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe..." (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Finally, all Christian pilgrims need to have the "patience of hope". This is that ability to endure while under pressure because we have a full confidence in all the promises of God culminating in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This

is expressed in the verse concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: "...Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

We conclude with some verses by Birdie Bell:

*"Pilgrim, whither journey you  
Along the path of life?  
What's the goal you have in view  
Along the path of life?"*

*"Far beyond our vision, friend,  
Is my journey's blessed end;  
Heavenward my footsteps wend  
Along the path of life."*

*"Pilgrim, why not halt and rest  
Along the path of life?  
Quickly on your way you've pressed  
Along the path of life."*

*"Nay, but through His precious grace  
Soon I'll end this earthly race;  
I have no abiding place  
Along the path of life."*

*"Pilgrim, why look you so glad  
Along the path of life?"  
"Nearing home, should I be sad  
Along the path of life?"*

*Where yon crystal towers shine  
I shall see my King divine,  
And eternal bliss be mine  
Beyond this path of life."*

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