

SERMON: *The Plight of the Undocumented Immigrant*
 SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:11-17
 SPEAKER: Pastor Phil Thengvall
 DATE: July 4, 2010

On this 234th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence I invite you to participate in an informal poll. Write your name on a piece of paper. Put a check by your name if you were born in America. Put two checks by your name if you were born elsewhere and immigrated to America. Put another check by your name if your ancestors immigrated to America, no matter if they were your parents or grandparents or great grandparents. Now put a check by your name if you were adopted? And finally, put another check by your name if you are an undocumented immigrant. If you answered correctly you all should have at least three or four checks.

If you only have one or two checks you probably made an inaccurate assumption on the last two responses. In the way I was using the terms *adoption*, and *undocumented immigrants* the majority of you are included.

If you are a Christ follower this morning you have been adopted, and you are an undocumented immigrant. How does it feel? What difference does it make?

As a child of 6 I was aware of some people in my small town (pop. 2000) in northern California who looked unusual, dressed differently, spoke a language I did not understand, and who all lived together in a large apartment building on the edge of town. My parents referred to them as DPs (displaced persons). I have since learned that these people were from Eastern Europe, casualties of WWII, forced to migrate from their homes and birth countries to find a new life in America. These people were aliens, foreigners, strangers in my small town in northern California.

How does the New Testament use these terms (adoption, aliens, and strangers)? Pastor Josh preached a great sermon about adoption on June 13. I want us to think of being adopted, not in a physical sense but a spiritual one.

Before our adoption into God's family we were aliens and strangers to Christ, without God, etc. as seen in Ephesians 2:11, 12

Ephesians 2:11, 12 *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

Depending on when you became a Christian, you may or may not have much recall of this period of your life. Since I was adopted into God's family when I was eight I have very little memory of the time prior to that event.

Upon our adoption into God's family an important change takes place as described in Ephesians 2:13, 19-20.

Ephesians 2:13, 19-20 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Our status has changed in respect to God and his family; adoption means citizenship, and all the rights and privileges thereof. We are in God's forever family.

Since our adoption into God's family we are now aliens and strangers in the world. I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:11-17, our text for today.

1 Peter 2:11-17 *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live 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.*

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

As Christians we share a common identity; we have all been adopted by God, we are aliens and strangers in this world, and we are all undocumented immigrants. This theme is found in other New Testament texts as well. When we studied Hebrews we read this about the heroes of faith.

Hebrews 11:13-16 *All 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. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own...a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Paul also speaks in this vein when he warns the Philippian Christians:

Philippians 3:17-19 *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.*

What does this mean, that we are aliens and strangers in this world? What is our plight as undocumented immigrants?

Implications of being undocumented immigrants: Soul Care is Critical.

We live in a “war zone”. 1 Peter 2:11 says, “*Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*”

The values, priorities, and purposes that we have differ from the values, priorities, and purposes of this world. In fact, what we value the world says is not valuable. What we value and try to care for, the world is trying to destroy. We value the invisible, the immaterial, the spiritual, we value our souls. God, in his Word, tells us our soul is the most valuable possession we have. Jesus asked this question,

Matthew 16:25 *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

The ultimate issue in this verse is that our soul is in danger of being destroyed. A war is being waged against our soul and if the war is successful, our soul is lost.

C.S. Lewis in his classic book, *Mere Christianity* said, “We are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel. Enemy-occupied territory, that is what this world is.”

This battle for the souls of men and women affects everybody without exception. And it affects everybody forever, in an ultimately serious way. And yet our world does not give serious attention to it. There is no column in the *Wichita Eagle* about it, there is no public service announcement on the radio, no blurb on television, and there is no governmental agency that tells us how to wage war for the salvation of our souls. We are told how to wage war against AIDS; against sunstroke; against mosquitoes; against drunk driving; and allergies, and depression and rape and fire and theft and cholesterol and dandelions. But the world we live in gives no guidance on how to fight for the eternal life of the soul. Is it any wonder that Peter calls us "aliens and strangers"?

How are we to wage war so that we will not lose our souls? We are told to abstain from sinful desires, keep away from them, avoid them, continually renounce them, don't indulge in them at any time. We need to make a clean moral break with the sinful impulses of our human nature. These harmful impulses if followed lead to self-protection, self-gratification, and creature comforts.

Remember, we belong to God, not to the world, and not to America. We must learn how to live from Him, not from television, movies, or fashion catalogues. We are aliens and strangers because we are God's adopted children. I appreciate this quote from John Piper.

“We must cultivate the mindset of exiles. If we do this we sober up so that we don't drift with the world and take for granted that the way the world thinks and acts is the best way. We don't assume that what is on TV is helpful to the soul; we don't assume that the priorities of advertisers are helpful to the soul; we don't assume that the strategies and values of business and industry are helpful to the soul. We don't assume that any of this glorifies God. We stop and we think and we consult the Wisdom of our own country, heaven, and we don't assume that the conventional wisdom of this age is God's wisdom. We get our bearings from God in his Word.

When you see yourself as an alien and an exile with your citizenship in heaven, and God as your only Sovereign, you stop drifting with the current of the day. You ponder what is good for the soul and what honors God in everything: food,

cars, videos, bathing suits, birth control, driving speeds, bed times, financial savings, education for the children, famine, refugee camps, sports, death, and everything else. Aliens get their cues from God and not the world.”

The Bible is not a book about how to get along in the world. It is a book inspired by God about how to live to God. Paul said in Galatians 2:19, “*Through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God.*” The aim of my life as a Christian—including my social and political life—is to live to God. When I live to God I live with God in view, I live under his authority, I live on him like I live on air and food and water, I live for his good reputation.

Implications of being undocumented immigrants: *Persecution is Predictable.*

1 Peter 2:12, 15 *Live 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.*

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

The persecution we face will come in the form of verbal attacks from the unbelieving world. These attacks will be upon our character, our life style, and our choices.

I. Howard Marshall, professor of New Testament in Aberdeen, Scotland said, “Though we Christians will have to respond to some hostile forces in an unbelieving world, we must live lives of a character that can be recognized for its quality even by non-Christians.”

These accusations took the form of malicious gossip and slander; no formal charges were brought against them. Christians were accused of engaging in incest and cannibalism (probably based on Jesus’ instructions, “eat my flesh, drink my blood”). One Roman historian said that Christians were “loathed for their vices”.

Peter assumes the difficulties his readers face are not from the governing authorities but from unruly fellow citizens. When unbelievers falsely accuse Christians of wrongdoing such slander usually springs from ignorance.

In case you hadn’t noticed, our society has developed a habit of labeling anyone who takes a view that goes against the conventional wisdom “a religious fanatic,” especially if they hold a traditional or conservative position. Thus people who oppose abortion on demand, are called fanatics. So are those who would appreciate just a little humility and honesty in the science curriculum of our public schools.

And isn’t it interesting how the media lumps Protestant fundamentalists, who reject violence and teach that we should love even our enemies, into the same camp with Muslim fundamentalists who openly urge their followers to kill all Jews and Christians, including women and children—and calls them all religious fanatics.

How are we to respond to this persecution, to being falsely accused by our detractors? Peter’s advice is similar to that of Jesus in Matthew 5 where he said, “*You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

The hope is that unbelievers will see from observation that the charges against the Christians are false.

Our hope, our confidence, our trust is in God, not in the economy, not in government programs, not in how we are viewed by society. When we direct our desires to God and find hope and contentment in his mercy and power and promises, then those who are watching us will observe our humble love, fearless courage, self-denying generosity, joyful simplicity, and peaceful suffering. These behaviors point to God's glory because they point to a stable, sure, satisfying object of desire and hope that is not of this world.

This passage calls us to see ourselves as exiles in this world and focus our desires on God so that our hope is in him and not in this world. The result will be an emerging beauty of behavior that conquers all slander and ignorant talk, and finally brings praise to God.

Implications of being undocumented immigrants: *Respect is Compulsory*

Biblical teaching about the Christian and the government is limited to Mark 12; Romans 13; 1 Timothy 2; Titus 3; and the present passage. It can be summarized in this way:

- It is necessary to submit to the authorities, and such obedience is rendered for the sake of the Lord who has appointed the authorities.
- Commend yourselves to the authorities by being model citizens.

1 Peter 2:13 says “*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors...*”

Respect is given for the sake of the Lord.

The key phrase in this verse is "for the Lord's sake." There is a kind of allegiance to human institutions that is not for the Lord's sake, and that is not what Peter is interested in. It may resemble Christian submission on the outside, but it is radically different.

We do everything for the Lord's sake because we are his servants first. Our absolute obedience is due unto him.

As Christians we do not submit to human institutions simply because we feel like it, or because we have compliant personalities or because the institutions have coercive powers. We do not look first at ourselves to see what we feel like doing, nor do we look first at the institution (like government) to see if there are consequences for not submitting. We look first to God (we live to God). We consult God about the institution. And we submit for his sake because he tells us to submit. This diagram puts our responsibility in correct order.

Fear God

Love the brotherhood

Honor all people

Honor the emperor

But you may be asking, “If we are aliens and strangers in this empire why should we have any allegiance to the institutions of this world at all? If we are a separate "holy nation" and if we are "God's people" should we not withdraw into our Christian ghettos, communities, and enclaves and have nothing to do with the powers and institutions of the world?” Some have chosen this response, but Peter's answer is a resounding “NO!”

While we are in this world, we are citizens of two orders, two systems: This world with its *necessary institutions*, and the order of the kingdom of God with its *necessary values*. God is the ruler and owner of both, and when we belong first to him and his kingdom, we are sent by him, for his sake, for his purposes, and for his glory into the kingdom of this world.

When this is our viewpoint our submission to the institutions and authorities of this world becomes an act of tribute to God's authority over the institutions of the world. You can look the president or the governor or the mayor in the eye and say, "I submit to you, I give you honor—but not for your sake. I honor you for God's sake. I honor you because God owns you and rules over you and in his sovereignty he raised you up for a limited season and has given you the leadership that you have.

For God’s sake and for his glory and because of his rightful authority over you, I honor you."

But how do pro-life Christians honor a pro-choice president? Now it almost goes without saying that I find myself more out of tune with this president than any president in my lifetime. But the fact is we must find a way to express our dismay at some of his views and some of his values while also communicating a basic respect for him as a person and a respect for his office which is ordained by God. For instance, I don’t think it was respectful to refer to our 42nd president, William Jefferson Clinton, as “Slick Willy” no matter how much he may have earned this moniker.

One way to find this balance is to let sorrow temper our indignation. This doesn't mean you will only talk about the president when you agree with him. It means that when you disagree with him, you will let the moral and social seriousness of the issue guard you from cheap, careless, cynicism, and move you to pray for him.

We began by showing respect to those in authority over us, and then we show the same respect to the laws they put in place. We keep the speed limit for God's sake, not because we might get a ticket. And all our driving becomes an act of worship. We pay taxes for God’s sake. We register to vote and cast our votes for God’s sake.

Peter reminds us in verse 16 that we are free, but we are also servants, bond slaves to God—which in one sense is slavery (because his authority over us is absolute) but in another sense is glorious freedom (because he changes our hearts so that we love doing what he gives us to do).

As Martin Luther said in his little treatise called “The Freedom of a Christian,” “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

We have been set free by God from slavery to all human institutions; and we are sent by God freely and submissively into those institutions—showing respect to them for his sake!

1 Peter 2:13-14 *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men whether to the king as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

God's purpose for those who rule is clarified here. This is reinforced by Paul in Romans 13:4 where it says that civil authority *"is a minister of God to you for good . . . [and] it is an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."*

History shows us that some rulers have used their authority in keeping with God's purpose, but some have not. Nero, who was the emperor when Peter wrote this letter, persecuted Christians, beheaded Paul, and crucified Peter upside down. He carried out these atrocities with impunity. The divine intention of government is to dam up the river of evil that flows from the heart of man so that it does not flood the world with anarchy (as, for example, in Rwanda and Somalia). Governments do not save; they are to maintain external order in a world seething with evil so the saving message of the gospel can run and triumph on its own power. That is why Paul urged us in 1 Timothy 2:1-4 to pray for kings and those in authority—because he desires that the gospel not be hindered by upheaval, so that more people can be saved.

Doing right is more than simply obeying the laws of the state or doing one's civic duty. Peter probably has in mind doing works of civic virtue or public aid. Christians can take heart in the knowledge that what is good conduct in God's sight is also beneficial to society and will be recognized by the emperor and his appointed magistrates.

In the recent community Prayer Breakfast Mayor Brewer spoke of the positive impact of both Love Wichita and Numana on our city. He "commended" us for doing things that are right and beneficial to our city.

In conclusion, we who live as servants (slaves) of God have general obligations to all men, and specific obligations to other Christians, God, and those in authority. Peter gives us four brief commands. The commands are linked together, each one proceeding naturally from the one preceding it.

The first two and the last two can be linked as pairs,

1. Respect everyone2. Love brothers in Christ
3. Reverence God.....4. Respect the Emperor

First, respect everyone, give to all human beings (good and bad) a basic deference and honor. The way you respect a scoundrel like Judas and the way you respect a saint like John will be different. But there is a way, and we are to look for it and find it.

Then, beyond that common respect and honor of all humanity, there is a special love that is to be given to "the brotherhood," that is, to fellow Christians. We have a higher obligation to fellow believers, to show them deep and committed love, *agapao*, the 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love.

This love is the cement that binds us together into a community, a family.

Next, beyond that common respect for all and that special love for Christians, there is a special fear fitting for God and no one else. We are not slaves of men, and so we do not fear men. We give them honor. But we reverently bow to God's absolute authority.

Then, "Honor the king." Include him in the admiration and respect given to all. He is not to be feared and he need not be loved as Christians are loved. But he must be honored.

We can also arrange these in this order, the first and last and the second and third.

1. Respect everyone4. Respect the Emperor

2. Love brothers in Christ3. Reverence God

We show everyone respect, whether our neighbor next door or the one who holds the highest elected office in the land.

This respect is due them as people made in God's image regardless of creed, color, or nationality. But we are called to love fellow believers and to fear God in ways that exceed respect shown to people in general and to our elected officials.

As aliens, strangers, undocumented immigrants, adopted by and slaves of God, as those who live to God we are free; free to give our absolute allegiance to God; free to show our affectionate love to other believers; and free to give our honor (respect) to the king and all people.

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