

CHOSEN TO BE STRANGE

Peter was a fisherman. He probably loved his work. Given the choice between being an apostle or being a fisherman, Peter would have probably chosen to continue being a fisherman. Even during Christ's ministry, Peter continued to fish. Christ actually went out with Peter in his fishing boat several times. When it looked as if Christ was irreversibly dead, Peter went back to fishing. It was when Peter had just been fishing, that Christ challenged him to serve Him full-time.

1. From these Scriptures, what impression do we get of Peter during the time of Christ on earth?
 - a) Matt. 14:28-31 _____
 - b) Matt. 16:22 _____
 - c) Matt. 17:4 _____
 - d) Matt. 18:21 _____
 - e) Matt. 26:33 _____
 - f) Matt. 26:40 _____
 - g) Matt. 26:73-74 _____

Peter was a rugged individual. He was a working man from a working class part of the country. He would have had a thick country accent and a tongue that could swear the scales of a fish. Yet something happened to Him. So radical was the change in Peter, that he began to refer to himself and other Christians as *strangers in the world*. This was not something that Peter had invented. He may have well known the references in the Old Testament to God's people being *strangers in the earth* (Ps. 119:19). But something happened to him where this religious talk somehow seemed so real: He really did feel like a stranger.

BECOMING STRANGE

Being strange means not belonging. People often try deliberately to not belong. They might dress strange, act strange, pierce strange parts of their body, all in order to be strange. But the strangest people in all the world are: Christians. The Bible word *stranger* can mean *visitor*, or *one who doesn't belong*. This raises two questions: *why don't we belong?* and *where do we belong?*

2. Who was the greatest stranger to this world and why did He come? (Jn. 3:17)

3. How did the world receive this Stranger? (Jn. 1:10)

Jesus came to make people strange. Any person who accepts Christ's leadership immediately becomes a stranger to this world. Jesus said that we could expect the world to treat us the same way that it treated Him (Jn. 15:21).

4. In what way do we offer hope to this world? (Matt. 5:14)

5. What response can we expect generally from the world? (Jn. 3:19)

WHY WE DON'T BELONG

But we were in the world. Something miraculous happened to us. God *chose* to reveal something to us. This makes us *the elect* (1Pt. 1:1). He has chosen us (1Pt. 1:2). You did not choose Him, but He chose you (Jn 15:16). Once God commenced the process of calling you, you were faced with a choice- *will I accept His invitation to be His child?* As with any decision, there may have been moments of doubt or

confusion. But the Holy Spirit enabled you to choose God and His offer of forgiveness. For the first time there was an awareness of guilt and sin. A horrible sense dawned on us that we had injured the most innocent person in the universe by what we had previously thought was tolerable conduct. We were made aware of our true condition. No longer was there a demand for self-esteem or personal pandering to our every whim from this life- for now we realised our utter depravity. A feeling of hopelessness overwhelmed us. How could we be good enough for God to accept us? How could God possibly forgive us for all that we had arrogantly done to Him? Even our most religious efforts seemed like filth compared to God's standard. We were broken. We were left without a claim to any personally achieved righteousness. We felt doomed. Then the Holy Spirit gently and lovingly took us by the hand and lead us to the cross. The great burden of sin, guilt, wickedness and filth that we had just become aware of snapped off our backs the moment the blood of Christ touched our souls. In just a few seconds, years of pain and anguish were gone. Like a man cooped up in a dirty smoggy room who struggled to breathe, we stepped out into fresh air, and breathed in God's forgiveness.

6. Once we were forgiven and saved, what did the Holy Spirit commence doing in our lives'?

(vs. 2) _____

7. In what way does the Spirit help us to live differently to those of the world?
(vs. 2)

8. What did Jesus mean in John 17:15-16?

Becoming a stranger in this world wasn't something we earned. It was achieved by the death of Christ. His blood was shed for us. We are sprinkled with His blood. The Old Testament has a picture of the High Priest sprinkling the people with blood as an act of cleansing the people and showing them the due penalty for their sin (Ex. 24:8; refer to Matt. 26:28). We have been spiritually sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

WHERE WE BELONG

The other implication of the word *stranger* is "one who goes off the road". It has the picture of a traveller on a journey who goes off the road to stay overnight in a town. Our conversion to Christ's Way means that we are strangers on a journey. We are going home. But even our journey is different to the people who belong to this world.

9. Consequently, because of Christ shedding His blood for us, what do we now enjoy along the way? (last part of verse 2)
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Peter, the author of our text, was a man on a journey writing to other people on a journey. He rarely touches on lofty issues, largely preferring to discuss practical road directions. He charts a course for all who have been called to the journey. He commences with our salvation, and ends with the triumphant return of our LORD. Let's begin our journey by reading the street directions that Peter was inspired to give us. May God help us to live like strangers, not to each other, but to the world. We need to be *really* strange to grab their attention. By living the way of Christ, we will automatically be classed as super-strange!

Amen.

Consider: Matthew 4:18 and John 21:4ff