

FIRST PETER 2:9-12 "Christian, You Are A Chosen People, A Royal Priesthood, A Holy Nation, A People Belonging To God. Walk As Such"

As we've been studying this first epistle of Peter the one thing which continues to stand out is Peter's desire to help us see our position before God and how a proper understanding and appreciation of this new life in Christ should motivate us to seek the Spirit who enables us to walk in this new life to God's honor and glory.

This is also why he uses this line of thought to help us put trials into perspective so that we don't lose hope in the midst of suffering. When our hope in Christ is at the forefront of our life then trials don't have to cripple us.

Peter brings this out in the beginning of this letter when he says in 1Pe 1:3,6-7 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

God can use even the trials we may face in life to increase our faith and bring us through so that He may glorified in the process. This is why Paul says in Rom 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

There isn't anything in our lives that God can't use for His purposes to glorify Himself if we're willing to trust Him and rely on His strength. But it's all connected to understanding and living in the hope He's given us in Christ.

And part of that hope lies in our position with Christ as He reveals it to us and we accept it by faith. Well, what does God have to say about our position with Him? Our text this morning reveals this.

1Pe 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

This description of our relationship to our Creator should make every born-again believer rejoice, knowing that this is how God sees us in Christ.

When Peter says to Christians in verse 9 that, "you are a chosen people", we see this same designation in Deu 10:15 regarding Israel.... "Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today."

And just as the nation of Israel foreshadowed the people of God in all generations, when they are designated as chosen, it is in light of all whom God has chosen before the foundations of the world, which is why both Jew and Gentile in Christ are called the Israel of God, fulfilling God's promise that all Israel will be saved.

Galatians 6:15-16 ¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Peter also calls us, the church, made up of both Jew and Gentile, a royal priesthood and a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. This too was a description God used for Israel in the book of Exodus.

Exo 19:5-6 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

What's Peter's point here in using this language for Israel in describing us? God chose a people to represent Him and to be used by Him to bring the world the message of salvation. This was a nation chosen among all other nations through whom the Messiah would come.

That nation chose to reject God and the Messiah. That nation was Israel. They were a treasured possession, they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, but they were also to love and obey God, which they did not.

Because of their rebellion God raised up a people from among the world to carry His name and to go forth to declare His greatness

and the hope we have in the Messiah Jesus. This was the promise given to Abraham.

Abraham was not just the father of a seed called Israel, he is the spiritual father of all the true Israel in Christ who have embraced the Messiah by faith alone for their salvation.

Galatians 3:6-9 ⁶ Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ⁷

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

It is not a coincidence that Peter is using the covenantal language given to Israel to describe the people of God, both Jew and Gentile, now called the church, the true Israelites by faith.

Romans 9:6-8 ⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

You and I in Christ belong to the same family as does Abraham, not because we are necessarily physical descendants but because we are spiritual descendants; children of promise.

Remember who Peter is addressing here in this letter. He's addressing the Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles who have trusted Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. And he places them both in the same category as being "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..."

But what does this mean for you and me today? It means a variety of things, not the least of which is that God Himself is personally involved in our lives to will and to work according to His good pleasure to His honor and glory.

Let's go back and quickly look at what God calls us in Christ. A chosen people, or as it reads in some translations a chosen race. The operative word here is chosen. God Himself has made a

choice to bring us into His presence and allow us to share in His eternity.

As I've said before, His choice of us had nothing to do with how lovely and wonderful we were, but in spite of our sinfulness and rebellion, He chose to give us life in Christ. And so, what we see is that Christ doesn't simply make people "savable", He actually and effectually, saves individuals who were chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world.

That's what this amazing grace is all about. We deserve nothing from God and yet He gives us all in His Son. Paul speaks of this amazing grace when writing the Ephesians.

Eph 2:1-7 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature [Or our flesh] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

God has chosen us to be His people; not to be our own people, but we are His people for His purpose. And then Peter calls us a royal priesthood. I touched on this last week and so I won't elaborate on it again, but the idea here is that we as a priesthood are to represent God before the world.

The royalty is that we belong to the King of kings and Lord of lords. We carry His name, we belong to a royal family which has an eternal life in God's kingdom. And this royal blood line goes back to the cross at Calvary, where Christ shed His precious blood for you and me.

Peter then mentions us as a Holy nation. The word holy in the Greek is *hagios* and it means sacred, consecrated for a special purpose. The idea here is that we are set apart by God to be a people who may be in the world, but are not of the world. Our citizenship is in heaven.

When people think of the word holy they often associate it with people who have halos around their heads and walk three feet above the ground at all times. But holiness is part of the sanctification process the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to conform us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

Holiness is a move towards God and away from the sinful desires of the flesh or sin nature. It's living in the new life we have in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And holiness is seen in a practical way whereby, because we love Christ, we obey Him. This is what Peter meant in the beginning of this letter.

1Pe 1:14-16 "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

In other words, in all that we do in this life, our goal should be to please our heavenly Father in all things, according to His will as He's revealed it in His word.

And then Peter says in verse 9 of our text that, "we are a people for God's own possession." Unfortunately, many in the church today have the impression that we are saved for the sole purpose of being possessed by no one other than ourselves.

And yet what are we told in 1Co 6:19-20 "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

We belong to God, He has purchased us with the blood of Christ to be His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession.

But why has God gone through all the trouble to come into this world, taking on flesh, and then dying for the penalty of our sins so that we might come into a personal relationship with Him? Well, Peter answers it here in verse 9.... so "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

We've been given the privilege to shine for Christ in the light of His love. We are to declare to the world that God is an awesome

God who has loved us with an everlasting love and who desires men to repent of their sins and trust Christ for life eternal.

Part of our declaration, according to Peter in verse 9, is to declare that He called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He came looking for us and calling to us and then empowering us in the Spirit to leave the path of darkness and destruction and enter into His rest.

Again, Paul brings this out clearly.

2Co 4:6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

The darkness we were brought out of is the darkness of sin which blinds us to the truth of Christ. Our own rebellion blinds us to the "Light of the world" who came to free us from this bondage to sin and its effects.

Praise God He has opened our eyes and allowed us to see our need for a Savior in Christ. He's the One who is light and He illumines our hearts and heals our souls and brings us to Himself to share in His presence forever. That's worth declaring to the world, so that they too might look to the light and be delivered from the darkness of their sin.

But, so as not to allow Christians to forget that this is all of God's grace and mercy, Peter says in 1Pe 2:10 "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Dr. Hiebert in his commentary on Peter says, "Peter, like Paul, believed it was good for believers occasionally to remember what they once were; it should deepen their gratitude for what they now are, God's people. They have been lifted so high as to have become not merely a people, but the people of God--belonging to Him and acknowledged by Him."

There was a time when you and I were not God's people, when we had not received mercy leading to salvation. But now in Christ we know what it means to be His people, to taste His mercy, and what Peter wants us to do is to appreciate so great a salvation that our

entire lives show it with thankfulness and loving obedience to Christ.

And so this is why Peter continues the way he does in 1Pe 2:11-12 "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 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."

There are a number of things we need to see here. First, notice the way Peter addresses these Christians. In the NIV it reads Dear friends. But the Greek word here is *agapetos*. It's an expansion of the word we know as *agape*, which speaks of God's love.

It goes much deeper than dear friends. The word is better translated beloved. And in the Greek it carries the idea of being loved by God and by Peter. Remember, this is God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is essentially addressing you and me and calling us beloved. This is how God sees us, because of what Christ has done for us, not because of some inherent righteousness we possess, but because of Christ's righteousness put to our account by faith.

And so God calls us beloved. But because we are beloved of God we belong to Him and are His people by virtue of His purchasing us with Christ's blood. Therefore, He speaks to us as His people who are to faithfully represent Him here in this world.

And so Peter says, "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

Peter, as an apostle, could have put this in the form of a command. And though it carries the force of something we should be doing, the form here is an appeal to their hearts, but it's a very strong appeal.

Dr. Wayne Grudem likes Phillips translation on this verse which says. "I beg you as those whom I love." Peter knew what was best for these people, as he knows what's best for us. And though he is pleading for our obedience to Christ, he wants it to be an obedience which is not under compulsion but out of gratitude for being chosen of God to be with Him forever.

And so he pleads with us to consider how we represent our Lord and Savior in this world. He says, "I urge you as aliens and strangers." Now, he's not referring to creatures dreamed up in the minds of people visiting us from other planets.

He's talking to you and me. And though we may seem like creatures from other planets at times, Peter is suggesting that our status in this world is such that we don't belong here forever, this is not our home.

I know it's very easy for people to get so comfortable in this world that they seem to have put down permanent roots. Peter is saying that we need to be living as aliens and strangers.

These two terms imply that we may be living in a land we call home, but in fact it's only a temporary residence until we reach our true homeland which is ultimately made up of the new heavens and new earth.

Even the O.T. saints understood this as is shown with Abraham in Heb 11:9-10 "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

We have a heavenly home and we represent our God in this foreign land for a relatively short time, and so we must demonstrate that in a way which clearly shows this world who we belong to and encourage them to seek this loving God.

Part of the way we show the world is through how we live our lives. I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul."

Fleshly lusts. What does Peter mean by this? Well, keep in mind the contrast he's making. He's contrasting new creatures in Christ whose home is with God, to those whose whole life revolves around the things of this world.

This world is represented in the scriptures as a place which is temporal in nature and as such can offer nothing eternal. The things of this world may satisfy our desires and cravings, but it cannot do anything for us from an eternal stand-point.

And so when scripture speaks of the flesh it doesn't necessarily mean that the flesh itself is somehow evil, but sin which works in the flesh, our old sinful natures, with its desire to please self instead of God.

And when self is living for itself it will conduct itself in a fleshly, temporal way, with little or no thought of God's righteousness or holiness.

Peter is saying that this kind of attitude and behavior is not what God desires for a people who don't belong to this world. We should be walking in a way that demonstrates the other world or life we belong to which is a life in Christ.

Fleshly lusts or sinful desires, as the NIV puts it, should not characterize the believer in Christ. We need to abstain from such things. In other words, we need to avoid such things, not even entertaining them.

The idea of abstaining carries with it the idea that we have the power in Christ to turn away from such things. There's a lot of teaching going around today which places the believer in a very precarious position when it comes to sinful desires.

Some of the teaching carries with it the idea that the enemy or Satan can do things to influence you to the degree that you don't have any power to turn away.

The world has convinced the church that what God calls sin is really a disease you're stuck in with no hope of victory over such fleshly lusts.

And by the way, when we talk of fleshly lusts this is not limited to sexual sins. This is speaking of all temptations we're susceptible to.

But remember, that greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. When Peter encourages us to abstain from fleshly lusts he doesn't mean to suggest that we attempt to live for God in our flesh or in our own power.

This is why we've been given the Spirit of God to enable us to walk as children of light. But notice too what fleshly lusts or temptations do in our lives. Peter says, "they wage war against our soul."

This is not some little skirmish that's going on. No, the enemy has only one thing in mind and that's to destroy our ability to glorify our God in our bodies. This is a war, and though we have the ultimate victory in Christ, it manifests itself as we submit to our Lord as we resist the temptations, as we engage our minds, our will, our strength in the Spirit, as we come to God.

I like what James says in Jam 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

It takes spiritual effort to walk away from the temptations of the enemy and of the flesh, but we're not in this war alone. Remember, it is God who has called us to Himself. "We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

But what is all of this walking in the Spirit going to accomplish for others in this world? Peter tells us in 1Pe 2:12 "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."

We are to be a witness for Christ, not only by what we say, but also by how we live for Him. The world will falsely accuse us of all sorts of things, but God says, don't let that stop you from continuing in my grace and strength and living to honor Me.

In fact, it's through our good deeds, as Peter puts it, that the world will acknowledge that we belong to God because we are holy even as He is holy. And they will have to acknowledge this especially on the day Christ visits us.

There are commentators who contend that this phrase "they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.", as not referring to His second coming. When speaking of the day He visits us, the Greek language is literally translated, in a day of inspection.

One of the objections to this, however, is that Peter speaks of a day of visitation which intimates that Peter has a day in mind. In fact, he tells us which day that is in verse 13.

1 Peter 1:13 ¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This is the latter bookend to a previous verse which also designates the day spoken of in verse 12, making the former bookend verse 7.

1 Peter 1:7 ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

This is no doubt the second return of Jesus Christ to this earth in judgment, and though it will happen on a particular day the timing of this day is not known and so when Scripture speaks of a day it is sometimes better to translate that to mean, "in that time" or "in that age."

Jesus Himself speaks of this when addressing the Jews, during what is known as His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. He also speaks of a time of visitation.

Luke 19:41-44 ⁴¹ When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

In this case and in the case to which Peter addresses God is the one who is visiting the times for judgment and to reveal Himself. The Jews had missed their time of visitation by the very Son of God. John wrote of this.

John 1:10-11 ¹⁰ He was in the world, and ^athe world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His ¹own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

Because they missed their day of visitation, at least as a nation, they would be leveled to the ground with no stone standing upon one another, which is a prophetic view to the destruction of the temple; that one place where the Jews could have visited the presence of the Lord through the sacrificial system, but would be destroyed for all time.

The day of visitation for the world will be a day where they will be forced to consider the Christ in whom we put our faith and have walked in a way that desires to bring Him glory through the works of the Spirit in our lives, but it will be a day in which they will glorify God on the day He visits us, because on that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In fact, Paul uses the same thought process as Peter in our text, when writing to the Philippians as he encourages them to look to that day when Christ will return and visit this cursed world for the last time and because of that anticipation we as believers should live lives of righteous works anticipating that visitation.

Philippians 2:9-16 ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

What a great privilege to be used by God in this way in this world. We are called for a purpose, a holy purpose to be used by our Creator.

And He doesn't send us out into this world on our own. He gives us His Spirit and all of the gifts and the power we need to accomplish His purposes. But we need to lovingly submit to God and walk as the people of God He's called us to be.

1Jo 5:2-4 "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

Trust God. The victory belongs to Him and in Him we are more than Conquerors. And don't ever forget your standing before God in Christ: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."