

A Peculiar People

1 Peter 2:9-12

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12 (KJV))

While I use some of the other translations of the bible more frequently than I use the King James Version, I do love and appreciate the manner in which the translators of the King James Version worded these scriptures. And that is especially so for this very special phrase here in verse 9 that describes those of us who are true believers in Christ as being “a peculiar people”. Listen!

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (KJV))

What do you suppose that God intends by the use of this phrase, “a peculiar people”? My thoughts go first to a busy city street, filled with a sea of people, all walking shoulder to shoulder, scurrying along the sidewalks, determinedly fixed on getting to their workplace or some other destination. Their faces show focused intention, most often ignoring all the other faces that they encounter, simply consumed with their own purposes. Some do smile because it is their personality to do that. Others simply press on toward their goal.

Then, imagine yourself as being one of those people there in that sea of faces, scurrying along to your next appointment. To all those other people who pass you by, would you for any reason stand out as being “peculiar”? Would you attract any special attention? Or would they just pass you by without noticing?

And what about God, what would His thoughts be about you, would you appear to Him to be “peculiar”?

It's with that thought that the song by Bette Midler, "From A Distance" again comes to my mind, the song that wrongly pictures God, who created all the people and the things of the earth, as simply standing off at a distance, watching, observing, taking in all of the activities of the people of His creation, intervening only when asked, otherwise, He just quietly watches.

Though Bette Midler had most all of those concepts about God very wrong, God really is watching us, ever so intimately observant, intimately aware and intimately involved in all that we do and all that is taking place within our daily lives.

Much has been said over time about this expression, "peculiar people". I recall a husband and wife ministry team by that name "The Peculiar People", who visited French Camp on occasion and ministered to our kids, using skits and drama activities. They were very enjoyable, and effective!

To us, in our modern manner of thinking, as we consider the expression "peculiar people", we envision people who have some form of oddity about them, perhaps in the way they look or act. In the dictionary, the most common definition of the word "peculiar" is "odd", "lacking conformity to normal".

And that would also be an apt definition that would apply within these words. Listen again!

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (KJV))

While no, your face or my face would probably not stand out in that sea of people, were we to be scurrying along the sidewalk with them, we would still very much be "a peculiar people". And God would see us to be exactly that, "a peculiar people", His "peculiar people".

In the days that the translators translated these words into the King James Version of the bible, the word "peculiar" was most often used to refer to something belonging to someone, as with someone's property. I like the definition given by one commentator. He tells us that . . .

"In this verse, Peter is not saying that Christians are odd or unusual people, even though the world often looks at us that way. What this passage is communicating is that Christian believers are people who belong to God, they are His own possession. Another way of saying it is that believers are "God's own special people."

He goes on to say . . .

As we compare the different English translations of this verse and consider the alternative meanings of the word peculiar, it becomes clear that peculiar in this verse is referring to the fact that believers are a “special people” because they were chosen from before the foundation of the earth to be “God’s own possession.”

Those who are “born again” are different from the world around them because they are being transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Also they are different because, having been born again by the Spirit of God and believing in Christ for salvation, they have received “the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). While it is true that believers are different, it is the believers’ “standing” as the adopted children of God, joint heirs with Christ Jesus, and God’s own special people that make us “peculiar.”

In other words, yes, God can pick our faces out of any crowd, simply because we belong to Him. We are His beloved and treasured “sons”.

And we see that to be so as we read other translations of the bible, such as the New American Standard Bible or the New King James Version. Listen!

2 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9 (NASB))

And in the NKJV, the verse reads

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV))

I like all of those translations, and they are all very accurate. But may I say that I still prefer the wording of “peculiar people”, and I don’t think that it is at all a mis-translation of God’s intent for our understanding. Yes, we truly are “a people for God’s own possession”, but that also makes us “odd”, “peculiar”. And while our special “oddity” might not stand out and be noticeable in amongst a sea of thousands of faces scurrying along a busy city sidewalk, we are still nonetheless very different from many, many of those other people walking along with us.

And no, we can’t easily know the condition of their souls as we pass by them at our rapid pace. But we can know that unless the same thing has taken place within their

souls as has taken place in yours and mine, then they are not a “peculiar people”. As the commentary I just read tells us . . .

Believers are a “peculiar people”, a “special people” because they were chosen from before the foundation of the earth to be “God’s own possession.” Those who are born again are different from the world around them because they are being transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

With that being said, how then, could you and I be recognizable as “peculiar people”, “odd”, different from those around us. Again, most likely, the difference will not be very recognizable on a busy sidewalk, but our difference can begin to be observed as we step into our place of work, or into some other slower paced encounter where time is allowed for relationships. It is then that these next verses begin to really matter. Listen, verse 11,

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12 (KJV)

The people to whom the Apostle Peter was writing this letter, were Jews in amongst a sea of “Gentile faces”. And in some ways, they might have looked a little odd, peculiar. Their Jewish facial features did not always look the same as their Gentile neighbors. And they truly were pilgrims and strangers in that Gentile land.

But that kind of “difference” was not the difference that God was calling these believers to demonstrate, both among their fellow Jews, and especially among their Gentile neighbors. The “peculiar difference” that God wants His “peculiar people” to demonstrate is “godliness”, “godly character”, “godly behavior”, “godly conversation”, in all that we say and do, so that as verse 12 tells us ,

they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.(1 Peter 2:12 (KJV)

You and I, and all those Jewish believers that Peter was writing these words to are often the only “Christ” that our neighbors and our coworkers, and even some of our family members will ever see, the only “grace” that they will ever experience. And we need to be careful to do our part rightly. Listen again,

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your

good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12 (KJV)

May I say that for many within that sea of faces on a busy city sidewalk, their character and their behavior make them all look exactly the same! This is a very broken world we live in. As Jesus described it in Luke 9:41, ours is a “crooked and perverse generation”. And as Ephesians 2, reminds us, at one time, you and I were also once a very willing part of this “crooked and perverse generation”. Listen!

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
(Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)

Folks, sometimes we might not feel like we are very far “out of those dark woods”. But be encouraged! If we have truly received Christ as our Savior and Lord, then we really are safely out of them. Our task is now to make very sure that our witness and our testimony shows it. And God tells us that here in these words,

that they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 (KJV)

You and I are

9 . . . a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.
(1 Peter 2:9-10 (KJV)

Folks, this is us, you and me! We were at one time not a “special peculiar people”. Until I was 29 years old, I was simply one face in a sea of faces, just trying desperately to forage my way through the crowd of other people just like me, lost and dying a little each day, caring only for myself and perhaps some for my immediate family, but not much more.

But then, as verse 10 tells us, I “obtained mercy” from God. I don’t know why He chose to reach into that sea of wretched faces and draw me out of the crowd. I was doing nothing of worthwhile note to deserve it. But that is the matchless wonder of “grace”. Grace is something that no one deserves or earns. It is freely given, without cost or merit.

And now, as verse 10 tells me, I am a “people of God”, a very, very special “son” within His family. And as God is telling us here in these words, it is “my turn”. It is “your turn”. And we need to get about “doing our part”. We are to . . . verse 11

11 . . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12 (KJV))

What exactly is God here calling you and me to do so that He will be glorified? God doesn't mince words or leave us to wonder. He goes ahead here and makes it very clear. We are to abstain from the fleshly lusts that war within our souls, the same fleshly lusts that are common among the unbelievers that we hang around with each day.

And we are to be especially watchful concerning the conversations we engage in. It is so easy to get on the same “rants” that our unbelieving friends let fly out of their mouths, cursing our government leaders, complaining about our workplace, using foul and vulgar language, and on and on.

None of that is of God or a part of His personality and character and neither should it be a part of ours. It is so well put in Philippians 4. Listen!

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9 (NKJV))

So then, may I ask? Are you “peculiar” or do you look a lot like some of your friends, your buddies who do not truly have Christ as their Savior. Do you blend in well with their crowd?

May I exhort you with all my heart! Surrender all that you are to Christ. Yes, you might already be fully saved, but we all still do need to go a lot, lot farther. As these words implore

9 . . . ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

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