

I PETER

God's Doing, Our Calling

January 27, 2013

I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness

- A. **I Peter 2:9-12** . . . 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; [10] for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [11] Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. [12] Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.
- B. Pray

II. God's Doing, Our Calling

- A. **I Peter 2:9** . . . 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. In this verse, God uses three two word titles and one five word phrase to explain who we are as the unified members of the Body of Christ, both in the local setting and universally.
 - 2. For the sake of today's teaching, I am going to call these phrases, labels – four labels that describe the church in four specific ways. And these four labels not only sound good, they imply good standing with God and marvelous privileges.
 - 3. However, in reading all of **verse 9**, we discover that God's intent is not only to give us wonderful sounding labels with marvelous privileges, God's intent is to use us, as His people, to accomplish specific tasks for Him. And the task described here in **verse 9** is to proclaim His excellencies in a world where darkness is obscuring the Light, where the devil seems to be winning, and where the ways of the world seem to have more influence than the Word of God.
 - a. In other words, God has fashioned His people into a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for His own possession so we can boldly and with the authority of our Head, Jesus Christ, proclaim God's goodness, holiness, mercy, love,

faithfulness, kindness, gentleness, humility, compassion, patience, long-suffering, concern for the weak and downtrodden, unsurpassable power, impartial justice, wisdom, hatred of sin, wrath against evil, love of righteousness, help for the humble, salvation for the lost, and promise of eternal life to whomever will listen in the world around us.

- b. Now I know that God's excellencies go far beyond the list I just gave you, but the point here is that He has chosen us and made us a new race of beings grouped together as the church so that we will exalt Him with our lips and glorify Him with our behavior.

B. To get a clearer picture of these four labels and their significance to God, and therefore to us, let us look at them one by one.

1. **A chosen race – speaks of our origin.**

- a. God first used this label with Israel in **Deuteronomy 7:6** where He says: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has **chosen you to be a people** for His own possession **out of all the peoples** who are on the face of the earth."
- b. When God gave Jacob the name "Israel," He was making it clear that He had selected this small group of people and had taken them out of their native land and out of their original people group (*or race*) in order to make them a new people group or a new breed of people, with a new land of their own. You see, up until that time, there was no tribe or people group known as Israel. As a tribe or nation of people, Israel got its start when God chose Abraham, and it received its official tribal name when God renamed Jacob, Israel.
- c. In the same way, before Christ's death and resurrection, there was no people group or race of people known as Christians. There was no church. And what God has done, through Jesus Christ, is to create a new race or a new breed of people to whom He has given a new nature – which makes them different from every other people group in the world. And God has formed this new group of people into a nation which He calls the church.
- d. The point here is that the church is made up of people who have been **chosen** and **called out** from among the heathen and unbelieving nations, and who, upon being born again and transformed in nature, form a distinctly new people group. This is why the Bible uses the terms "born again" and "new creation" when referring to this new race or breed of people.

- e. I believe you can understand how being born again makes us a new race of people and places us in a new people group. But let me add to that truth by pointing out that as Christians:
 - (1) we all share the same **origin** (*born of the Spirit*),
 - (2) we are part of the same **family** (family of God),
 - (3) we have a common **ancestry** (*that cloud of witnesses and those saints who have gone before us*),
 - (4) we share the same **nature** (*the divine nature or new nature*),
 - (5) we submit to the same **master** (*Jesus Christ*),
 - (6) we use the same **language** (spiritual words),
 - (7) we rely on the same **writings** (*the Holy Scriptures*),
 - (8) we share the same **status** (pilgrims on our way home),
 - (9) and we are going to the same **homeland** (*heaven*).
- f. The important truth here is that the church has an origin that makes it a different race of people from all other races of people in the world. And the distinguishing characteristics of our origin enable us and prepare us and give us the motivating reason to proclaim God's excellencies to the world.

2. A royal priesthood – speaks of our function.

- a. Once again, God used similar words about Israel in **Exodus 19:5-6** when He said: "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; [6] and you shall be to Me a **kingdom of priests** and a **holy nation**."
 - (1) This portion from Exodus is an important historical picture of the New Testament church, because it points to the uniqueness of the relationship God's people have with God (**a kingdom of priests**), and to the world (**a holy nation**).
 - (2) So follow the logic here – not only were the Israelites a new race of people, but **IF** they obeyed God and lived according to the covenant God made with them, then they would be a kingdom of priests unto Him and a holy nation for His glory.
 - (3) The significance of this is, that though Israel had designated priests, God was telling them that **IF**, as a nation, they lived to please and serve Him, they would all be treated as priests and enjoy the privileges belonging to priests.
- b. Now let's jump to the New Testament. When Jesus died on the cross, we read in **Matthew 27:51** that the veil of the temple was

torn in two from top to bottom. Now this torn veil was the Temple curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

- (1) At that time, common Israelites who came to the Temple, and Levites who were serving in the Temple, had free access to the outer courts of the Temple. But only priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the High Priest, once a year, with the sacrificial blood, could enter the Holy of Holies.
 - (2) So what Jesus did in tearing the veil, was to make it possible for all God's people to have constant access to the presence of God, and have the privilege of serving God directly.
- c. In other words, the church as a whole has a privilege that far exceeds the privilege of the High Priest, for we are not limited to visiting the presence of God once a year. We can live in God's presence and have His presence live within us, because of what Jesus has done to save us and transform us (**John 14:23**).
- d. As you may recall from our reading of **Exodus 19:5-6**, Israel's privilege of being a kingdom of priests came with certain responsibilities. In the same way, our privileged priesthood comes with specific responsibilities – which surely include loving Him, obeying Him, and serving Him according to His will and direction.
- e. However, we are not just a priesthood, we are a royal priesthood. So what does it mean to be a royal priesthood?
- (1) It could mean that we are in the service of the King.
 - (2) Or it could mean that in being born of Christ, we share in His Kingly lineage, which means we are of royal blood, and in that way a royal priesthood.
 - (3) However, I choose to see this label as significant because it points to the superior position we have as priests. As members of Christ's church, we are not common priests (*if there should be such a thing*), but we have been given a privileged position of priesthood that surpasses that of the O.T. High Priest.
- f. Therefore, as God's **royal priesthood** –
- (1) We can freely go into and remain in the presence of God, whereas the High Priest could go into God's presence only once a year, and then only for a short time.
 - (2) The service we render is not annual, but daily, which makes it at least equal to the service rendered by the High Priest.
 - (3) And finally, living in God's presence is not just one-sided, but two, for just as we, the church of Jesus, live in His presence, He also lives in us!

3. **A holy nation – speaks of our character.**

- a. Returning once again to **Exodus 19:5-6**, we read: “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; [6] and you shall be to Me a **kingdom of priests** and a **holy nation**.”
- b. While Israel was going from Egypt to the Promised Land, God told them how they came to be His people, how they were to live, and what His purposes were in making them a holy nation.
 - (1) However, we know from Israel’s history, that having the label is not the same as living up to what the label says we are.
 - (2) And so just because they were called Israelites does not mean they always lived according to God’s intentions for them.
 - (3) Therefore, having such labels as “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” did not mean they automatically enjoyed the privileges associated with the labels, for enjoying the privileges was not the result of having the labels, but the result of fulfilling the responsibilities required by the labels.
- c. **Exodus 19:5-6** makes it clear that for God to treat Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, they had to obey His voice and keep the covenant He made with them.
 - (1) Now you may be thinking that it is different with us because we are under grace rather than under the Law like Israel.
 - (2) However, such thinking defies both logic and the Word of God. Consider this – is it possible to be a holy nation without being holy in character, word, and action? Does having the label automatically make us what the label states? NO!! The label is only an authentic description of those who have the label when those who have the label live up to the label.
- d. What is the point here? For Israel to be a holy nation and for the church to be a holy church, those who make up this new race of people must be holy people in all their behavior, just as God is holy (**I Peter 1:16**). Now this may be challenging and difficult at times. And we may be hard pressed by temptation, trials, and tribulations. However, by God’s gracious empowerment and help, and by the life of Jesus within us, and by diligently and carefully doing our part – as given to us by God, and by working together as a group, we can be the holy nation God has called us to be.
- e. And what is God’s purpose in making the church a holy people? According to **I Peter 2:9**, God’s purpose is to have a body of people

who have a legitimate basis (*holiness of life*) for talking about and living out God's greatness and glory before the eyes of the world.

f. Which brings us to the last label of **verse 9**.

4. **A people for God's own possession – speaks of the One we belong to and therefore the One to whom we owe all our allegiance, complete submission, and faithful obedience.**

a. As with the first three labels, this one also comes from the O.T. where it was used by God in reference to Israel. Returning one more time to **Exodus 19:5**, we read: "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine."

b. Because God is the creator of all things, we can rightly assume that all things belong to Him – which includes every people group, tribe, and nation.

(1) Yet God selected a specific person, that is Abraham, to create a new race of people, that is Israel, who He would make His own in a way that exceeds His ownership of all things.

(2) And in NT times, God once again selected a specific person, that is Jesus Christ, to create a new race of people, that is the church, who He has made His very own in a way that exceeds His ownership of all things and supersedes His ownership of Israel.

c. And just to affirm that the NT supports this OT teaching of a unique relationship of ownership between God and His people, in **Acts** we read that God purchased the church with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**). Added to this are Paul's words stating that we are not your own, for we have been bought with a price. Therefore we are to glorify God in our bodies (**I Corinthians 6:19-20**).

d. The point here is that we, as individual Christians and as a group of believers, belong to God. He possesses us. He owns us. Therefore, He is the One to whom we owe allegiance, submission, love, and obedience. And this brings us to the middle part of **I Peter 2:9**.

C. **I Peter 2:9 . . .** 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. As the church of Jesus, we are a **new breed of people** with a new nature and the law of God written on our hearts. We are a **royal priesthood** with the privilege of living in the presence of God and the responsibility of serving Him according to His will and word. We are a **holy nation**, with the expectation that our lives, individually and as a group, will match this noble label. And we are **owned by God** – for the specific purpose of proclaiming to the world the beauty, the glory, the awesomeness, the greatness, the goodness, or as Peter says, the EXCELLENCIES of God.
2. God has done all this, not for our sake, but for His! As Paul says in **II Corinthians 5:15**, God has done all this so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but for Him.
 - a. Is there something in us which makes us worthy of being God's possession? NO! . . . for just as God chose Israel to become a great nation while they were few in number (**Deuteronomy 7:7**), so Christ died to save us while we were yet sinners (**Romans 5:8**).
 - b. Ought we to live lives worthy of our calling? Yes! . . . for just as Israel had to live worthy lives to remain a great nation accomplishing God's will (**Deuteronomy 7:12-16**), so we, as the church, must live in a manner worthy of our calling if we are to be useful to God in fulfilling His intentions for us (**Ephesians 4:1-3; II Timothy 2:20-21**).

III. Conclusion

- A. These four labels proclaim great things about us, but it is all for God's glory and the furthering of God's purposes in our world.
- B. May we, as Christ's Body, humbly receive these four labels and diligently devote ourselves, as individuals and as a church, to living according to the labels so that God will get the glory He deserves.