

1 Peter 2:9-12

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy.

¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and temporary residents in the world, to abstain from the desires of the sinful flesh, which war against your soul. ¹²Live an honorable life among the Gentiles so that even though they slander you as evildoers, when they observe your noble deeds, they may glorify God on the day he visits us.

Who Are You

I.

Who are you? In one way or the other, the author had had to face that question several times.

Aren't you one of his disciples? At times he might have been completely willing to answer, "yes." When it was time to pass out food to the thousands who were seated nearby, it seemed to be quite an honor to be identified with Jesus. When he was standing around listening to Jesus teach or watching Jesus perform miracles, it was a heady thing to be identified as one of Jesus' close disciples.

Aren't you one of his disciples? When confronted by a mere servant-girl as he was standing around at Jesus' trial, it was no longer fashionable to be identified as a disciple of Jesus. He was having an identity crisis.

Certain presuppositions had been made during Jesus' tenure on earth. Peter had been convinced that Jesus was going to be a certain kind of Messiah—basically the kind of Messiah most people of his time were looking for. He thought Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom. He thought that he, Peter, was perfectly positioned on the ground floor to be in a cabinet-level position in the new "Jesus" government.

Then, Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was put on trial. Peter didn't want to *completely* abandon him, but he was no longer sure he wanted to be identified with Jesus, either. He followed the arresting soldiers at a distance, and tried to get as many glimpses of the trial as he could, but he wanted to remain incognito as much as possible.

Aren't you one of his disciples? "Not me!" was his adamant answer.

That identity crisis was long past, now. He had been ashamed of his behavior. He hadn't even been able to look Jesus in the eye after the Easter Sunday resurrection. He had barely been able to mutter, "you know I love you," when Jesus went about reinstating him. After that, Peter went on to be a stronger supporter of Jesus than he ever had been before. Peter became bold and fearless in his proclamation of Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world. Nothing would shut him up. Not threats of imprisonment, not torture, not even his eventual crucifixion—after all, his own writings and his sermon on Pentecost and other things Peter did still speak to us today.

So Peter could speak as someone who understood an identity crisis. He had been forced to face the question "Who are you?" plenty of times.

II.

What about you? Who are *you*?

Just as it was for Peter, sometimes being a follower of Jesus can be a heady experience. Around your family and friends who are also believers, it's easy to identify as one of the family of God. It's wonderful to stand up on your confirmation day and confess your undying faith, and to make your pledge that nothing will separate you from your Savior, Jesus—ever.

Like Peter, times might come when that isn't such a popular position. Peter writes: "Dear friends, I urge you...to abstain from the desires of the sinful flesh, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11, EHV). Peter was mocked at the trial because of his association with Jesus. The sinful flesh doesn't want that. Being identified as a Christian will gain many presuppositions by your coworkers and friends.

When you disapprove of drunkenness, you will be labeled a party-pooper. Take a stand against homosexuality or transgenderism and you'll be called a bigot. Mention that you don't approve of even a man and woman living together without being married, or the casual sex so prevalent today, and you'll be known as a behind-the-times prude.

It can get mighty tempting to try to be Peter at the trial and just slide in under the radar. Don't let anyone know you're a Christian. See if you can just get by. In fact, that seems to be becoming an almost necessity considering today's business climate. Say anything that doesn't agree with modern culture, even if you merely echo what the Bible says, and you could find yourself out of a job.

Who are you? Perhaps, like Peter, it would be easiest to be labeled a coward. Just keep quiet about who you are. Maybe you'll never need to take a stand.

III.

While Peter did that at Jesus' trial, as you know, he didn't stay that way. But this isn't a pep talk to tell you to pick yourself up and act like a Christian. At his reinstatement as a disciple, Jesus made it clear that grace wasn't dependent on Peter and his actions, it was dependent on Jesus, himself.

Peter does the same thing here in his letter. No pep talk; at least, not the kind that tells you that you must do something, or else. His pep talk reminds you of who you *are* by God's grace.

"But you are..." (1 Peter 2:9, EHV). The words of our text start a contrast to the previous verses. "But" points back to those Peter had just mentioned—unbelievers. He had called Jesus the cornerstone, and said: "Because [unbelievers] continue to disobey the word, they stumble over it" (1 Peter 2:8, EHV). Unbelief is natural. That's the static state everyone is born with. A person is born an unbeliever. A person is born one who stumbles over the message of Jesus.

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, EHV).

Start with "called out of darkness." The darkness of unbelief is what makes the natural, unconverted self stumble around and stumble over the message of the Savior. The message of Jesus doesn't make sense, because unbelief keeps a person in darkness. But...that's not who *you* are. You have been called out of that darkness. You are in the marvelous light of Jesus Christ; you know him as the Savior—the One who paid for your sins in full.

Now move backwards in that verse. You are "God's own possession." Jesus owns you, because he died for you to pay the penalty for your sins. You belong to Jesus. He bought you for a purpose: "so that you might proclaim the praises of him" who did all those things for

you.

That makes you “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” It sounds like things are different now than in the Old Testament, but God said through Moses: “You will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation” (Exodus 19:6, EHV). The nation of Israel was to be a beacon to the world of God’s promises. So are believers today. As Jesus said in the gospel today: “You are the salt of the earth...¹⁴You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14, EHV). Believers are the living representatives of Jesus to an unbelieving world.

Who are you? “At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy” (1 Peter 2:10, EHV). Peter reiterates your status as people of God. At one time you were an unbeliever; you were part of the “not a people” group. But God showed mercy to you; he sent the Holy Spirit to work faith in your heart, and now you are a member of God’s own family.

IV.

Remember the part of this reading we quoted before? “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and temporary residents in the world, to abstain from the desires of the sinful flesh, which war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11, EHV). Earlier we spoke of this verse in the context of the temptation we face to be as Peter was at Jesus’ trial, and try to fly under the radar and avoid being labeled as Christians.

That’s not actually the way Peter intended it, however. He meant it to be an encouragement to live as the child of God you already are.

Who are you? As one of those who is a member of the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the people belonging to God, you are different from the majority of the people in the world. While perhaps that marks you as different from the rest, it isn’t a reason to duck for cover. It’s time to admit you *are* different. It’s time to live like an alien—like a temporary resident in this world.

Push aside the desires of the sinful flesh. It may be tempting to be part of the drunken crowd, but you know that’s not really you. The debauchorous sexual behavior you see on TV and in movies—and among your coworkers and friends—might sometimes seem alluring, but that’s not your identity. Those things will continue to war against your soul, Peter says. As Luther says, we remind ourselves of our baptisms every day and drown the Old Self with its evil deeds and desires and put on the New Self, who wants to live as a child of God.

Jesus said in today’s Gospel: “Let your light shine in people’s presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, EHV).

Peter says the same thing. “Live an honorable life among the Gentiles so that even though they slander you as evildoers, when they observe your noble deeds, they may glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12, EHV). Living your faith will naturally mean that you do things unbelievers see as unexpected. Those things that demonstrate your faith are a powerful witness. Sometimes when they see your noble deeds, they will want to learn more about what makes you different in such a positive way.

Who are you? You are special. Not because of some great talent you have, but because of what God has done. God has chosen you. God has made you his own. You need never wonder, because you have been shown God’s mercy. He made you his own dear child. Amen.