

*9But 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; 10for 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.*

*11Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12Keep 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.*

When I was in 6th, 7th, 8th grade, I was a surfer. I didn't know how to surf but those were the kids I wanted to identify with.

In Southern California the Beach Boys were in a knock down drag out fight for supremacy with the Beatles. You had to choose! Well, the Beach Boys were singing about cool cars. Deuce Coupe's, T-Birds, and Woodie's. Sort of a no-brainer for me. The Beatles were singing about love. Something that was as foreign to me as long hair and English accents.

So, I identified with surfers. Surfer cars. Surfer music. Surfer style. And way out there for me, but I was hopeful, maybe some day, even a surfer chick.

By the end of high school, I was a cowboy. What can I say. The surfer thing wasn't really workin' for me, and music had moved on past wholesome things like cars and surfing, to psychedelic love. The age of aquarius. Drugs and sex and rock-n-roll. Even before I was saved, it really wasn't me.

So I simply switched to country, when country wasn't cool. I tolerated country, but it was really western music that I loved. I still do. We put gun racks in our pickup trucks. Eddie Arnold singing Cattle Call. Very weird for an 18 or 19 year old.

If you come to my house and press me, I will wind up the victrola and put on some Bob Wills for you. That's weird 45 years later. That was my identity. I hate pop to this day. I'm left behind. I checked out for good when Elton John came on the scene. Later I admitted some of the songs were in fact, good.

Those stories about my search for identity are pretty tame. Boring, really. Because America has gone off the tracks these days with identity crisis. It gets complicated.

I was reading a piece at Challies dot com on Tuesday. He was talking about the Toronto Pride parade and he says; "A couple of weekends ago the annual Pride Parade shut down the city center here in Toronto. It capped what had already been a 10-day Pride Toronto festival. The parade gave an opportunity for the LGBTTIQQ2SA\* communities to declare their pride in who they are, and they did it by parading through the heart of the city. The event was publicized, televised, and celebrated."

LGBTTIQQ2SA has an asterisk, and if you go to the bottom of the piece he gives you a breakdown. \* LGBTTIQQ2SA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirited and Allies

All of those terms define identity. This is who I am. Affirm me or I'll burn your house down.

Next in line after broadcasting whatever your sexual dysfunction is, would be race. Donna bought Jeff a DNA analysis. We learned Jeff is more dutch than Donna. We're 30% this and 40% that and 15% something else, and a pinch of who knows what.

Oh, and by the way. Galli's were slaves long before the Africans were stolen and brought here. So there's that. Race. Position. Class. All hooks to identify with.

Then there's FACEBOOK. Everybody on earth has a Facebook page where you build your own eclectic identity and broadcast it. This is

who I am. Like me! Please, please, like me. push the like button.

Then, there's teenagers. From a 2008 review of the movie American Teen by Al Mohler, the movie was about 5 teens. Megan the princess. Jake the geek. Hannah the rebel. Colin the jock, and Mitch the heartthrob.

Everything is about identity. Then you start adding up the medical definers. ADD and ADHD and a whole giant host of things that end in the word disability. Everything has a name. Everyone has an important sounding disability to hide behind. Or a syndrome. Fetal alcohol syndrome.

We are a people who have a name and description for myriad disorders and non-disorders because disorder sounds negative and we're proud of all of our combined defining dysfunctions.

Identity has become incredibly complex. Impossibly complicated. Dysfunctionally complex. There are 1 billion Facebook accounts and the whole point is that there are 1 billion different uniquely invented eclectic identities. And the one with the most "likes" wins. Right?

Right about now you're thinking, is this rant going somewhere Jim? Yes. Yes it is. Because in the midst of identity chaos, Peter comes along and says, if in fact you are a christian, a real one, as defined in all of chapter one and chapter 2 up until this point, Peter has the audacity in our modern chaos to say;

If you are a christian, this is who you are. This is your identity.

And if there was ever a verse in the Bible that is jam packed, it's this one. There is SO much here, and it's all incredible. This is **our** identity. This is who we are. We don't need numbers and letters and pictures and styles and codewords and facebook pages in order to invent an identity. We have one, made for us by our Father who loves us. Peter spells it out for us.

*9But 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; 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.*

Let's start right at the beginning. You are A chosen race.

I read all the time. I'm interested in the church and all the interactions within the so-called church of the living God.

One of the areas I am interested in and read about from time to time is the interaction between black christians and white christians in America.

There's a real identity issue there. It gets talked to death. Is there such a thing as the "black church". My gut reaction is no. There's just the church. But then I get informed that because I am white, and that is my frame of reference, I can never understand something outside of that.

I was born into the privilege of whiteness and don't you dare try to speak to someone outside of that life experience. You can't go there. That's a club you can't join.

I've heard it all and read it all. Peter says something very interesting here. He says You are a chosen race. You are a chosen ethnos. You are race of people who have in common that you are elect.

God has chosen you. He has taken you out of this world. This cosmos. This fallen world ruled by Satan. God has selected you, taken you out of that world, and placed you in a new world. A world that He owns. He rules. And Peter says, when that happened, everybody that happened to, became a separate ethnos. A separate race.

And it has pleased God to elect people from out of every nation, every ethnos, every culture, every background, every class, from every tribe and language and color, and He has placed them in His kingdom and Peter says, that group of people are a new ethnos. We are a new race. We aren't defined by color. We're defined by God choosing us.

Black American christians, muslim American christians, Jewish American christians and whatever other kind of christians, I suppose we better include old, fat, white anglo saxon privileged christians, whatever you think you came from; get over yourself.

We are a race with only one thing that identifies us. We are chosen. God selected us, He took us out of this fallen world, and He placed us in His Kingdom. We are a new race. A new ethnicity.

Paul says to the Corinthians who were struggling with this concept; *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2Cor. 5:17*

Christians are new creations. You leave the world and all it's identities behind. You have come out of that world, into a new one.

Listen to the verb tenses when Paul tells those same Corinthians; 9 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

No christian thieves. No christian drunkards. No christian swindlers. No christian homosexuals. Only formerly drunkards, formerly swindlers and liars, formerly homosexuals, formerly thieves. Such *were* some of you, but you were washed. You were sanctified. That word means set apart. Separated. You were taken out of the old world with the old things and placed into a new one.

That's pretty black and white. We come out of the world with a lot of baggage. Some of those things Paul lists are more difficult to leave behind than others. We come into this new life with our old dead flesh and all of it's old dead desires.

All true. And Christians can fall into various sins from their old life. BUT and this is a big one. Those things, none of those things in that list can be your lifestyle. You might fall into some previous sin, but if the Spirit of the living God is living in you, it's impossible to stay in any of these sins.

That's why Paul says do not be deceived. Don't kid yourself. If you're a Spirit indwelt believer, you can't live these old things as a lifestyle AND be a Christian.

Identity was a problem at Corinth. Besides the catalog of old sins, some of them were inventing denominationalism. In 1 Cor. 1 he tells them; *11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

First church of Paul. A few blocks away, the First church of Apollos. And across the tracks, the First church of Cephas. I'm a Cephas Christian and we don't believe like those Paul Christians over there.

Two chapters later, Paul makes the exact same distinction that Peter does. A chosen race. Separated from this world. Paul says in identical fashion; 1 Cor. 3: *1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?*

Paul says, you're not living like a chosen race. You're living like you're still in the old world. Identity. Jealousy. Strife.

I'll take you to one more example. The dichotomy of this fleshy world compared to the truths of a new spiritual Kingdom we have been called into. This one is really interesting because it speaks of spiritual realities

of the new, living harmoniously with previous realities.

*1Cor. 7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price;*

You can still be a slave physically during your stay in the old world, but the reality of your new life is, Christ has purchased you out of that slavery. You belong to Him. But for now, you may have to keep being a slave. Don't worry about it. Take freedom if it's offered. But the reality is, you belong to Christ. He purchased you.

The same spiritual truth applies to the free man. Free to this old world, but the new reality is, Christ purchased him with a price, and he is now Christ's possession.

Spiritual reality. Physical reality. We are a chosen ethnos. An elect race. But we still live here in some of the old realities for our stay on earth. The old things will die. The new things are eternal. Temporal truth. Eternal truth. Eternal trumps temporal.

Did you see the distinction with old temporal things in the examples. IF the old things were sin, you leave them behind for good. Walk away from it. You're a new creation. But some old temporal things you have to put up with for your time here. Slavery isn't a sin, at least for the slave. It may be for the slave owner. Slaves are told to remain in the temporal. Peter's going to tell us why, in a few more sentences.

*9But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION,*

All of these identities Peter ascribes to us are parallels with Judaism. Many or perhaps even most of his audience is Jewish Christians. We talked about their plight last week.

If you were a Jew and became a Christian, you were kicked out of

Judaism. You became a non-jew, with a family who rejects and shun's you. You are excommunicated from the temple, the priesthood, everything it ever meant to be jewish.

How interesting that Peter plays off of that loss of jewish identity. In fact, Peter actually quotes from Deuteronomy 14:12 here; "*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*"

He actually quotes and combines several places in Deuteronomy. Peter says you may have lost your old jewish identity, but God has placed you into a new spiritual race. And that new ethnos, for now at least, in the new covenant relationship has replaced all of those things in Judaism.

They threw you out. But God included you. In fact, temporarily, God has thrown them out. You're in. They're out.

OK, identity 101. We're a new race of chosen people. Chosen out of the old temporal world, into a spiritual one. And Peter says, you not only don't need that old priesthood that excommunicated you, but brace yourselves for this one. ***You are*** a Royal Priesthood.

In Exodus 19:6, God through Moses told the children of Israel; *and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*

God was foreseeing a day when every person would have access. A kingdom of priests. Exodus 19:6 was never realized in Israel, but it has come true for all christians. We have access in Jesus Christ, to God.

And Peter throws in a real zinger. We are not only priests, we are a Royal Priesthood. That idea was completely foreign to Jews. Priests and Kings were mutually exclusive. And any time a King tried to step into the role of a priest it ended in disaster.

Saul was deposed as king and replaced by David for this sin. And in 2 Chronicles 26, the unforgettable story of Uzziah. *15 In Jerusalem he*

*made engines of war invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.*

*16 But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. 18 They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God." 19 But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. 20 Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him. 21 King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD.*

Kings are not priests. Priests are not kings. Mutually exclusive. You need a little background.

In Exodus 19, God said you will be a kingdom of priests. God's plan was that He would be King. A Theocracy. A Kingdom where God rules and every man has access. A kingdom of priests.

But Israel wouldn't have God as King. They told Samuel the prophet, we want a king like all the nations that surround us have. From 1 Samuel 8; ...*6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. 8 "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also....*

Israel rejected God as King. But in the new covenant, the new race of peoples God has selected out of this world and into His kingdom, Peter says something startling!

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In God's new elect race, we are a Royal Priesthood. We have access to God, through Jesus Christ, and IN Jesus Christ, we co-reign with God. We are priests to the King. And we have Royal authority with Him. We will reign with Him. The old things have passed away. We are priests and kings.

The author of the book of Hebrews goes into great detail explaining this new phenomenon, so diametrically different than what Israel was used to.

We are like Melchizedek who Abraham paid tithes to. He was both priest and King. If you had come out of judaism, this is fantastically radical. Hard to get your head around. The words of Exodus 19:5 and 6 have come true in us. This is what God spoke to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

*5 '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.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*

There is a difference. Peter has just told us, all of these distinctives are our identity. This is who we are.

The difference is that when God spoke these words to Israel, it was a conditional statement. If you do this, then this is true. And Israel failed.

Every man born in Adam's race is destined to fail at God's conditions. But then, one man was born who was not in Adam's race.

Jesus, born of a virgin, His Father is God, and He perfectly kept God's

conditional statement. And we have been selected, chosen out of this world, and placed IN Him.

All of the promises accrue to us because we are In Christ. Paul tells the Colossians in 3:2 *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory....*

In Christ, I am a member of a new race of elected people. In Christ, the old world is vanishing and I set my mind on things above. In Christ I am one of a kingdom of royal priests with access to God. In Christ I am a member of a Holy Nation. In Christ I am someone who is selected to come out of the old fallen world and now I am a part of a people for God's own possession.

All of the things God told Israel they could be in the conditional statement, I have inherited, in Christ. The world is in an horrific identity crisis, but I left that world behind and this is my new identity. Do you get that?

You say, yes, we get it, but we wish more of it was true in practice. That's all true in the sweet by and by. Now we get down to the nasty now and now. Something's got to give, right. Because most of the time we're standing with Paul in Roman's 7 saying;

*21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*

Paul articulates this dichotomy, this dualism that continues to dwell in our dying flesh, even after we are elect saints. We are all of those things Peter has given us in our new identity, but every one of us can identify with what Paul is describing here.

We could categorize this idea and say, there is positional truth, and practical truth.

Positionally, every thing Peter has just described about my new identity is 100 percent true, because I am In Christ. That's my position. I've been given the down payment of His Holy Spirit who dwells in me. All of it both IS true, and some day, all of it will be realized.

But the nasty now and now is that we struggle. All of it is true, but for now, all I have is the down payment.

But that's a powerful down payment. Paul doesn't leave us flailing in Romans 7. We go right into Romans 8 and we learn that this Holy Spirit who dwells within us will give us victory over sin and flesh . . . every time we choose it.

Positinal truth. Practical truth. Positionally everything Peter tells me is mine is set in place, waiting for me in heaven. Practically, I'm slogging it out in this old dying world. Sometimes I make the right choice and the Spirit wins the battle for me. And too often I waive the white flag and let sin take me prisoner. Again. That's our reality.

Well, we made it half way through the first verse. This must be important stuff, because I figured we would make it through vs. 12, and the Spirit had other ideas. To me, that's exciting. This study is so fluid. We move along at His pace. How marvelous is that?

But I want to leave you with some haunting questions. Because I am a student of the church in America, and I'm disturbed by what I see.

Peter gives us our identity. And it is an identity that is distinct from this fallen world. That much, if nothing else I said, that much is crystal clear.

The church is a new race. A new ethnicity, distinct from the world. It's them and us. Black and white with a huge gap between us. Our identity is:

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But I look around me in America, and I see a church that is in most cases not more than an ever so slightly christianized version of pop culture. We take pop culture and we change a few of the words, but the message is very clear.

There really isn't anything different at all about being a christian. Christians are cool man. Our music is cool. Our coffee is just as good as the worlds coffee. Our preaching doesn't come from this book, it has boiled down to some kind of therapeutic deism. God is your friend who will help you realize all of your dreams. He's your big brother watching out for you.

Peter's identity is distinctive. Totally removed and set apart from this dying world. Our modern christian identity is completely indistinct. Christians are just as cool as the world. Sometimes we're even cooler THAN the world. We are indistinct. No one can tell the difference.

So come on down. You may as well join a club of really excellent people who are all just as cool as the rest of the world and the pep talks are short and they're all about how you can be a better you, and fire insurance is included and it's all free. Who wouldn't want a deal like that.

And it's selling. Mega-churches in big cities are multi-million dollar businesses. 10, 12, 15 thousand members. No cost to join. Nothing is expected of you. No change necessary. You get to be a better than ever you. God will make your grass greener than anyone else's grass on the block, and if your SUV wears out, He'll make sure you can afford a new one. Oh, and after all this, heaven.

They can't build sanctuaries big enough. They have to tape the pastor and the second, third and fourth services at all the other campuses are via gigantic projection TV.

So who's right? Peter with his distinctives. *9But you are A CHOSEN*

*RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, Or the modern all embracing non distinctive mega church.*

I'm going to read you a scary letter. It's from Jesus. Listen to what He says, which I fear defines our modern church in America. I'll read it in it's entirety;

*14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:*

*15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Rev. 3*

The problem seems to be that the church is indistinct from the world. The church should be red hot. The world is dead cold. The Laodiceans are luke warm. Indistinct.

But here's the scary part. He vomits that so-called church out of His mouth, and my personal belief, now this is just me, but consider what I say; My personal belief is that luke warm church that is vomited out of His mouth, that happens at the rapture.

The true church goes to heaven. The luke warm church, that thought they had it all figured out, they thought they were rich, those folks get vomited out at the rapture and in fact they become the nucleus of the one world government, one world religion we see later on in Revelation that goes to perdition.

OK, I'll say it very plainly. I do not believe that MOST of the people involved in the mega church movement in evangelicalism, are saved at all. That's just me. You can take it or leave it. But at least, think about it. Think about Peter's definition of our identity, and how that compares to evangelicalism in America today.

Oh, God of our Fathers in a continuum that goes all the way back to Peter and Paul, make us distinct in the world. Make us salty. We don't want to be like the salt Jesus spoke of that isn't salty any more, and it's only good for trampling down into a foot path. Cast out. Make this church distinct. Amen.