

Our Identity in Christ

I Peter 2:9-10

The story is told of a hitchhiker who was trying to get a ride one night in Los Angeles. An approaching motorist pulled over to pick him up. When the hitchhiker got into the car he saw the face of the driver and immediately recognized him. The driver was actor Kirk Douglas. The hitchhiker was shocked and all he could think to say was, "Do you know who you are?"

Before our very eyes we are witnessing an identity crisis in our society. From gender confusion to self-identification they are wondering who they are. Yesterday they identified as a male, today as a female, tomorrow they will identify with no gender, the next day they identify as a squirrel or a dolphin. I read recently about a woman who for years was fixated with giraffes and the African tribal women who stretch their necks so she began to identify as a giraffe. She started the process of adding metal rings to stretch her neck and began dressing up like a giraffe. After years of attempting to identify as a giraffe she gave up that quest.

Many are on a journey of self-discovery to find out who they are.

In our passage today Peter helps answer that question. There are three specific questions he addresses. They're found in I Peter 2:9-10.

Who are we?

How did we become who we are?

What is our purpose?

So let's begin by answering the first question who are we?

I. WHO ARE WE?

Darwin wasn't the first to theorize the evolution of man as having a common ancestry with all other living organisms, but he was the first to really

popularize it through his trip to the Galapagos Islands and the writing of his book *Origin of the Species*. It was an attempt to connect the dots, so to speak, in the evolution of mankind from a single celled organism to the complexity of our being today.

While man and animal share similar features it does not mean that we share a common ancestry. It only means that our Creator used the same ideas in creating each living creature. Just because we may all have eyes, ears, limbs, lungs, a heart, blood, muscle, a brain and so on does not mean there was a common ancestry that morphed or changed over millions of years to bring about the animal kingdom we have today.

Did you know that a pig's heart is very similar in composition to the human heart and is used in trials for testing surgical heart procedures before going to human testing? But that doesn't mean we are descendants of pigs no more than it means we are descendants of a chimpanzee just because anatomically we may appear to be similar.

Take a car and an airplane for example.

Both are made of metal.

Both have tires.

Both have an engine.

Both have an electrical system comprised of wiring and circuitry.

Both have lights and an instrument panel.

Both use some type of fuel.

Both have a windshield and a steering mechanism.

Even though there are many similarities between the two it would be absurd of us to conclude that the plane, which came after the invention of the car, evolved from a car.

If you need a reminder, Peter tells us who we are.

He began his letter with an affirmation of our identity in verse 1 of chapter 1. We are "God's elect and strangers in the world". He was writing to Christians who had been scattered throughout Asia

Minor and who had been suffering for their faith in Christ. As they went through times of hardship because of their faith or just because they sometimes encountered trials in life it should be an encouragement and comfort to realize who they were in Christ. We ought to take to heart the same message of hope and help when we face adversity and suffering. We are reminded in Scripture that the difficulties that happen here are only temporary and that in eternity we will not encounter any of those hardships. This world is not the end, that there is more in store for the Christian.

Because of our position in Christ we receive certain privileges because of that faith.

The first thing we need to keep in mind then is that Peter is talking to Christians.

The second thing that is helpful in looking at this passage is that Peter is going to go back to the Old Testament to draw some comparisons to the nation of Israel and the church. I want to stress here that this in no way means that the church is Israel and will receive Israel's promises. Both are separate and yet both are drawn into one body through a common faith in Christ. The church has not replaced Israel in God's overall plan. He is not finished with Israel and has promises to fulfill that apply only to them. But the church has been established by God to fulfill what Israel failed to do. We will talk more on that in a moment.

Right away in verse 9 we see a contrast. Peter is going to contrast the group of people he just spoke about in verses 7 and 8 who have rejected Christ with those who have received Him. In essence, verse says:

You didn't reject Him.

You didn't stumble over Him.

You didn't disobey Him.

You received Him.

Here is the first part of who we are, our identity.

A. We Are a Chosen People

The "you" in the Greek is plural and emphatic and refers to all those who personally know Christ as Savior and are therefore recipients of these privileges. Living stone after living stone, we are being built into the body of Christ, the church, not just the church that meets here at this address, but rather every believer. Each individual who trusts Christ as Savior is being added to the collective whole that comprises His body, the church.

We are a chosen people, a chosen race. Let's be clear that God's choosing us did not occur based on any merit, any good, any favor He found in us. It's not because we were more likeable or popular than others, or better looking, or better behaved, or better givers, or easier to love, or didn't commit as many wrongs as others or that our wrongs were not as bad as others. He did not choose us because we were worthy. He chose us to show us His love. It is by His amazing grace. We are told in Scripture that His choosing us was made before the foundation of the world.

Now I'll state here as I did when we discussed being chosen by God in the beginning of our study that it's a mystery to me how God chooses sovereignly but yet is man's choice through his free will to accept His gift of salvation. What this divine selection does for me is give me an absolute confidence in the security of my salvation believing wholeheartedly that there is nothing that can pluck me from the Father's hand. Nothing can separate me from His love. He will not let go of us.

It was a winter retreat weekend at Camp. I was standing on the top of snow valley waiting my turn to go down the hill. It was back in the days when you could still use a toboggan. There were several of us staff kids there. I think I was in Jr. High. Another staff kid who was a Senior was there with his new girlfriend. They climbed onto the back end of a full toboggan and were pushed on down the

hill. They were told to hold on tight. I overheard another staff kid say that our friend wasn't ever going to let her go. That's how much he loved her. They eventually got married.

Jesus told Nicodemus that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son that whoever believed in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

Paul says that God's love is clearly evident when in writing to the church in Rome said that God's love was demonstrated when Christ died for us sinners.

John 15:16 bears this divine selection out. "You did not choose me, but I chose you..."

Because He chose us He will never let us go. We have been called out from among the people of unbelievers to be a new race of people.

Galatians 4:28 "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise."

Think about how special that should make you feel, that you have been chosen by God. It isn't a moment of pride that somehow gives us something to brag about, but one that is humbling. That was Israel's problem. They took being chosen by God as a privilege to the exclusion of the other nations around them. Instead of being a light expressing God's love, they hid the light and excluded others from a relationship with God. We then, as God's chosen, are to be a light to the world to draw them to the Savior.

Who are we? We are chosen. We didn't earn it and we don't deserve it. That ought to leave us in awe of God choosing us.

Because we are the chosen of God, this is a call to a personal and practical holiness as we remember who it is we belong to. Live in such a way that it is clear to others who you belong to.

When I went off to college my Mom reminded me

that I belong to God's family, to Camp's family, and to the Wideman family. Live as a faithful representative of each.

It should be of great comfort to know who we are in Christ, to know that we have been chosen by God. To know who we are helps in times of personal trial.

To know who we are leads to living a life that pleases Christ.

Don't forget that we are a chosen people.

Peter then mentions a second part of our identity.

We are a royal priesthood.

B. We Are a Royal Priesthood

The idea Peter expresses here comes from Exodus 19:5-6.

This was a conditional clause – *if* Israel obeyed God fully, *then* out of all the nations they would be His treasured possession and although everything in the whole earth belongs to Him, they of all people groups would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This promise is repeated several times in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 (14:2; 26:18)

We learned last week that every believer is a priest who has been called to serve God. A priest in the Old Testament dedicated himself to serve as the Lord directed. He consecrated himself to purify and prepare himself to serve the Lord.

In like manner, the church and we as individual members of it are called to be God's royal priesthood.

Warren Wiersbe sums it up this way: "In contrast to the disobedient and rebellious nation of Israel, God's people today are His chosen and holy nation... The church today is to God and the world what Israel was meant to be."

We are to be a light and an example drawing people to God.

How are we doing?

As a royal priest we have immediate access to God. Unlike the nation of Israel who could only come to God through their priestly representative, we can come boldly into His presence because our High Priest, Jesus Christ, who made the way possible for us.

Hebrews 4:14-16

We are royalty because we are the children of God and joint heirs with Christ.

We are royalty because when we were born again we were born spiritually into His family.

We are priests because the righteousness of Christ has made us holy.

In the Old Testament those two positions were separate, the king could not be a priest and neither could a priest become a king. Yet King Saul attempted to be both when he sacrificed an animal before God and was rebuked for it and had the kingdom taken from him.

But now we are both – a royal priesthood.

As a royal priesthood, God's holy temple, we are always called to serve Him wherever we find ourselves. Remember that as His holy temple, God is always present. We act as a royal priesthood when we offer ourselves as acceptable, holy, living sacrifices.

In II Corinthians 5:18-21 we read that we are God's ambassadors and have been given the ministry of reconciliation to help bring men to Him. That's what a priest does.

As a royal priesthood we have a dual responsibility. The first is for us to separate ourselves to God. The expectation is for us to be holy as He is holy. The second is for us to consecrate ourselves to Him for service. We discussed some of these last week. We serve Him with our bodies as a living sacrifice. We serve Him with our praise.

We serve Him with our substance, what we have.

We serve Him with our good works.

We are a royal priesthood.

There is a third part to our identity.

C. We Are a Holy Nation

A nation is made up of a group of people or citizens who live within its borders. There are laws and regulations that they abide by as citizens. They strive for the well-being of other citizens.

Philippians 3:20 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

As a holy nation, we are citizens of a new kingdom established through Christ. That we are a holy nation means that we have dedicated ourselves to God and are separated from the world. God is our king. As a part of His kingdom we aren't to try and live under two banners. As citizens of God's kingdom we are to be set apart to serve Him exclusively and to obey His laws. John 14:21 in effect says that if we are His followers or citizens we show our love by keeping His commands.

Israel forgot this and became steeped in sin. Israel forgot what made her special and distinct from the other nations around her. In Leviticus 10:10 they were to make a "difference between the holy and the unholy, and between the unclean and clean."

There is one more part to our identity.

D. We Are A People Belonging to God

What that means is that we are a prized possession. Take mental note for a moment of everything you own. What would you consider to be most valuable to you?

Some stock

A family heirloom

Something of great sentimental value

Your spouse or children (Okay, maybe some of you just changed your mind.)

Why are you special to God. Paul, in I Corinthians 6:20, reminds us just how valuable you are to God. He writes that you were bought with a price and that price was the shed blood of His Son and then He challenges believers with this: “honor God with your body.” In essence – live holy, remember how special you are, remember that you belong to God. We are His because we were bought with a price and became part of His forever family when by faith we trusted Christ for salvation.

That we are God’s possession is also seen II Corinthians 6:16 “I will be their God and they will be My people.”
We are God’s special possession, of great worth to Him.

Who are we?

We are the chosen of God.

We are a royal priesthood.

We are a holy nation.

We are people who belong to Him.

Live in such a way that identifies who we are and who we belong to.

But how is it we have to come to have this identity?
How did we become who we are?

II. HOW DID WE BECOME WHO WE ARE?

We have already answered this in part through our first question. We were chosen by God. But we see something else in verse 10. At one time we didn’t belong to God.

Peter turns the reader’s attention to the Old Testament here.

Hosea 2:23 (Romans 9:25-26) “I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will show My love to the one I

called ‘Not My loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My people,’ ‘You are My people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”

Hosea is speaking here about the spiritual restoration of Israel, but Paul in Romans 9 uses this as a reminder that God is a saving, forgiving, and restoring God. Peter speaks of a God who extends His mercy to those who were not His people, so that by accepting His mercy become His people. God in His mercy has grafted us together with Jewish believers to make us one body. Once we lived in darkness but now we have been brought into His light and we are now the people of God.

There are two kinds of darkness. One is intellectual darkness where a person has the inability to see the truth. The second is moral darkness or immorality – the inability to see and do what is right - and that is what Peter is referring to here.

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all else, who can know it.”

Romans 8:7-8 “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

We have been called out of darkness and into His wonderful light.

John MacArthur writes: “They receive both the intellectual light of God’s truth and the righteous desires to obey it; neither of which they had before conversion.”

As God looked on us in our deplorable condition, He was moved to do something. He had compassion on us. Lamentations 3:22-23 “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed (that’s His mercy toward us), because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness.”

Frederick Wm. Faber has written in his hymn “there

is a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea."

One author has written that mercy is "God's compassionate treatment of us even though we deserve the full measure of His Justice."

When we consider the depth of the mercy God has shown us to bring us into the kingdom of light, that ought to change how we live, which brings us to our final question. What are we to do?

III. WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ."

We have already considered that as God's people, we are to live separated to God, to be holy as He is holy and in that consecrated state to serve Him. Who we are in Christ gives us purpose and that purpose is seen in the second part of verse 9. "That you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

All the privileges we have been given aren't just for our benefit. They serve a purpose that through them we might also praise God.

The term "proclaim" means to tell out or advertise. Everywhere we go and everything we do is the opportunity to show and tell others about the mercy we have received from God. Our conduct as His citizens is a living advertisement of the virtues of God. They point people who are in spiritual darkness to the wonderful kingdom of light.

I hope you leave today with a better understanding of who you are, how you came to that position and what you are to do. You are a child of God, His citizen through the mercy He has shown you for the purpose of telling others. You have a wonderful identity in Christ.

Look around you. There are many places of darkness that need the light you have. What can you do?

Doug Nichols was the International Director of Action International Ministries serving as a missionary with Operation Mobilization. Living in India in 1967 he was admitted to a tuberculosis sanitarium to treat his TB. Over the several months that he was there he tried to hand out tracts and copies of the gospel of John, but no one would take them. They didn't like him. They thought he was just another rich American.

For several nights he would wake up coughing at 2a.m. He noticed a little old man trying to get out of bed. The emaciated man couldn't stand up and would begin to whimper. He would lie back down in bed. In the morning the stench in the ward was terrible and everyone became angry with the old man for not being able to contain himself. The nurse who would clean up his bed would smack the old man for soiling himself and making a mess for her to clean up.

The same thing happened the next night. Doug woke at 2 from coughing, noticed the old man trying to get out of bed, would lie back down and begin to whimper. Even though he was terrible weak and sick, Doug got out of bed and went over to the old man. He cowered in fear, but Doug picked him up and carried him to the hole in the floor that served as the bathroom. Then he carried him back to bed. The man kissed him on the cheek as he put him in bed.

At 4a.m. that morning Doug was awoken by another patient who held a steaming hot cup of tea and made motions indicating that he wanted a copy of the book Doug had been trying to pass out. Even though he could not speak their language all day people came to him asking for the booklet – the gospel of John.

One way to declare the praise or excellencies of God is to act them out. Who we are is for God's glory. God made us who we are. Let's go out and show others who He is. God's mercy is still available today.

When Alexander the Great camped before a city he was about to conquer he would set up a light to give notice to those inside that if they would come out and surrender to him while the light lasted they would receive mercy. If the light was put out and he attacked, no mercy was to be expected.

God has given His light and extended mercy, but a day is coming when the light will be removed and His mercy will end.

Maybe today God is calling you out of darkness?

Will you listen and obey His call?

Maybe today God is calling you to remember who you are and to pursue a call to godly living.

Maybe today God is calling you to proclaim His praise.

When we know who we are in Christ there is no identity crisis.