

CHURCH, KNOW WHO YOU ARE (PART 1)

An Exposition of 1 Peter 2.4-10

For many, many centuries, Christians have confessed the Apostles creed and our belief in “the holy catholic church,” meaning the separate and universal church, that single body of people distinct from all others, spiritually speaking, by the sovereign grace of God, in contrast with the world, everyone else who isn’t part of the church.

As we continue expounding the apostle Peter’s first epistle, we come to a passage that teaches us about our identity as Christ’s church, 1 Peter 2.4-10. It describes Jesus Christ in His spiritual identity and His church in relation to Him with respect to our spiritual identity and calling. Hear the biblical passage with all reverence now, because it is the Word of God.

⁴ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ⁵ ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷ Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, ⁸ and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. ⁹ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous 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.

Amen. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. To summarize the main idea of this passage, we say,

Church, know who Christ is and who you are in relation to Christ.

Peter ranges through five basic characterizations of the church’s identity in relation to Christ, with ample comments about His identity, too: 1) a temple, 2) a priesthood, 3) believers, 4) the new Israel, and 5) receivers of God’s mercy. The first three are for today’s sermon, the last two, for another.

I. The Temple with Christ (vv. 4, 5a, 6a)

Two metaphors are mingled together in verses 4-6: “a spiritual house” or temple, and “a holy priesthood.” The priesthood is in the latter part of verse 5 and we will consider it separately. First, look at everything else in verses 4-6a:

⁴ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ⁵ ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, . . . ⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious.

“To whom” refers to “the Lord” mentioned in verse three, which is a reference to Jesus Christ in particular. “Ye have tasted that the Lord [Jesus Christ] is gracious. To whom [Jesus Christ, ye are] coming,” is the sense. The translation takes this as stating a fact that you Christians are those who are coming to Christ. It is probably best to take this coming as including not only your conversion, but your

continuing to worship and serve Christ by faith. For this is what true Christians are: those who are coming to Christ for the rest of their lives, until we see Him face to face one day.

Peter interrupts his statement about the church's identity as the Temple to state important and relevant things about Christ's identity in this regard. Christ is a "living stone," the first stone to be placed in the construction of the living and spiritual Temple that Peter has in mind.

The grand theme appears here and throughout Scripture of a Temple for God's dwelling among and with His people. The OT physical tabernacle and later the Jerusalem Temple were but temporary types of the spiritual temple God would raise up in the latter days—first Jesus Christ, then the church of believers in Christ, and finally, the whole redeemed cosmos in the consummation at Christ's second coming.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus identified Himself as the Temple in the more profound sense. He said to the Jews who asked for a sign of His divine authority, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They thought He was talking about the Jerusalem Temple, but He was speaking about "the temple of His body," specifically, of His death (their destroying Him) and His resurrection (His raising Himself from the dead on the third day of His burial). All this is in John 2.18-22. Jesus is the new and spiritual Temple, the hope of spiritually-minded saints of the OT period, based on oral prophecies at first and later the written prophecies of the OT Scriptures.

Furthermore, Jesus is the first stone that would compose the living, spiritual temple of the last days, built with many living stones. The prophet Isaiah had foretold this centuries before, and Peter quotes the ancient prophecy in verse six. An English translation of the Greek OT cited here runs like this, "therefore thus saith the Lord, even the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Sion a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious *stone*, for its foundations" (Isa 28.16, Brenton LXX in English). And Peter acknowledges that Christ Jesus is "disallowed indeed of [or, rejected by] men." In relation to the reprobate sinners who never shall be saved, Christ is "the stone which the builders disallowed [rejected], . . . a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" to them who disbelieve and continue to disbelieve (vv. 7, 8).

This is relevant to the church's unique identity in the world. Christ is objectively "chosen by God" and that negates any diminishing of Christ who is "rejected by men." Christ is also objectively "precious," and as we see later in the text, the church recognizes that He is precious (v. 7). Our special identity as the church is bound up in the reality that, unlike the world, we are not rejecting Christ, or stumbling over Christ to our ruin, or offended by Christ. God has made us like Christ the living stone. Being redeemed by His grace, we are now also living stones built upon Christ the living foundation stone as "a spiritual house," that is, the new spiritual Temple where God's glory is especially seen and His people, starting with Jesus, enjoy fellowship with God in and among us!

The church is, then, the spiritual temple God is building in the last days, with Christ as the first and charter member, our entire spiritual foundation, and the rest of us in living union with Him, as the sacred dwelling place of God in fellowship with His holy people. I know we are not much to look at, but we should behold ourselves by faith and know that we are God's Temple in the world. O church, knowing your spiritual identity in your unique relationship with Christ, like Him and united in Him, glorifies God and has vast implications for our worship as the church and our service to God in this world.

II. A Priesthood Through Christ (v. 5b)

Peter's second characterization of the church is as "a holy priesthood," and this, too, throws much light on our identity in our special relation to Jesus Christ. Just like with the living stone, where Jesus is the first and foundational living stone and the church is composed of redeemed people who are living

stones built upon Christ, so it is with the holy priesthood mentioned here. Christ is the High Priest, and it is through Christ our mediating High Priest that we, too, are priests with a priestly ministry, after a fashion. As our High Priest, Christ gave Himself on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, and in this act He was both the priestly offerer and the sacrificial offering that was offered up to God for our redemption. Since the cross, Christ rose again, ascended to heaven, and now serves constantly as our High Priest by His intercessory prayers for us, so that we are “acceptable in the Beloved” (Eph 1.6) and not on account of any merit in us, whether it be our faith or prayers or good works.

Admittedly, the priesthood of old Israel was holy because it was ordained by God. But Peter’s use of the word “holy” here is comparable to his use of the term “spiritual” of the house or Temple. It intends a contrast with the old covenant form of worship. Christ is the first and only “High Priest” of the new spiritual Temple. Just like the Jerusalem Temple was a mere temporary type of the spiritual Temple which would finally appear in redemptive history, so, too, the Jewish priests were mere temporary types of Jesus Christ our High Priest. This is an important theme in the book of Hebrews, which says, for example, that Christ has come as a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building (Heb 9.11). We Christian believers now have “a high priest over the house of God” (Heb 10.21) in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2.5).

These things assumed, Peter presses further and makes a statement about the identity of the church in Christ. He expressly teaches here “the priesthood of believers.” “Ye are . . . a holy priesthood” (v. 5). But the old priests did more than intercede and mediate for sinners. They also offered sacrifices as acts of thanksgiving and praise to God. This is our role and calling as believer-priests. “Ye are . . . a holy priesthood, to offer up *spiritual* sacrifices,” as opposed to physical sacrifices of animals like the OT priests. And we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God in His Temple which are only “acceptable to God by [through] Jesus Christ.” A similar remark is found in the book of Hebrews. “By [through] him [Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb 13.15). The fruit of our lips giving thanks to God is one form of the spiritual sacrifices we offer to God. We also offer up ourselves in thanksgiving sacrifice (Rom 12.1), and our financial giving for the ministry is also “a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God” (Phil 4.18). All these are activities we perform in our identity as a holy priesthood.

III. Believers Prizing Christ (vv. 6b-8)

The third way Peter characterizes the church is as believers who prize Christ, to whom Christ is unspeakably precious. This is suggested by the passage from Isaiah that Peter is reciting here, from the latter part of that quotation. Again, I quote to you the English translation of the Greek Old Testament Peter evidently had in mind, and it says, “he that believes on him [i.e., the costly stone, corner-stone, precious stone, for Zion’s foundations: i.e., Christ] shall by no means be ashamed” (Isa 28.16, Brenton LXX in English). The KJV translation says “make haste;” the sense seems to be of a person who becomes panicked and so is put to shame regarding their trust in the precious stone which is Christ. The KJV translates the text in 1 Peter 2.6, “be confounded,” which English word used to mean to be ruined or destroyed (MWCD11).

So Isaiah prophesied of people in the future who would come to believe in Christ when and after He came into the world. Their faith in Christ will most certainly issue in salvation. Then Peter wrote, “Unto you therefore which believe he [Christ] is precious” (v. 7a), as Isaiah had prophetically declared Christ to be objectively precious. Peter reasons from that passage, then, that believers, in particular, are the ones in the world who recognize that this Messianic stone, Jesus, is “precious.” Here’s an alternative translation of this small part of First Peter that may help us see the connection of ideas: “For it stands written: ‘I lay in Zion a choice corner-stone of great worth. The man who has faith in it

will not be put to shame.’ The great worth of which it speaks is for you who have faith” (NEB), or, “For you who have faith it [Christ the precious stone] has great worth” (REB).

And indeed, through faith, Christ is prized by every real Christian and by the true church as a whole, being made up of believers. Matthew Henry said, “Whatever differences of apprehension and affection there may be among Christians in other things, this they are all agreed in, Jesus Christ is precious to them” (on SS 1.2-6). Thomas Watson said, “A child of God desires Christ for himself; to a believer, not only heaven is precious, but Christ is precious” (Discourses 2.176). Alexander Maclaren said, “Whatever good any soul seeks, Christ is the highest good, and is all good” (The Beatitudes and other Sermons, p. 181). Thomas Goodwin said, “As the soul sees the spiritual excellency and the glory that is in Jesus Christ, so the will sets the highest value and esteem upon that excellency that is in him, a value and esteem far above what a man hath for all other things whatsoever; and *this is to believe*. . . . *This is the first thing in believing on Christ*, which is an act of the will. He that believeth on him, unto him Christ is precious” (Works 8.303, emphasis mine). O praise God, my brother and sister, if you have been made to love Jesus Christ as the most precious One above all others and above all things to you. All with this mark are people that God is determined to save. Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10.37), and, “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14.26).

However, the fact is, that vast multitudes of people in the world do not prize Jesus Christ. He is not precious to them. They do not love Him. In fact, to say they dislike Him would be an understatement. They are not His disciples but His enemies. They live in a constant state of disobedience to Him. And to explain Peter here, “unto them which are disobedient [to Christ, He is] the stone which the builders disallowed [rejected], the same [stone] is made [by God] the head of the corner, and [also, to them, Christ is] a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” This is the sad condition of everyone who persists in refusing to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and to follow Him as their Lord. “They stumble at the word, being disobedient,” Peter says. To disbelieve in Christ always entails disobedience to Christ.

Now we might wonder, why, O why, do some people believe the gospel and not others? Why do some people go to their deathbed without ever prizing Jesus Christ as the blessed Savior that He is? Why do they reject Him again and again and again, stopping the ears of their heart to every gospel sermon, resisting every Christian witnessing to them in private, failing to seek God in solitude through Jesus Christ? Well, they are sinners, you say, and rightly so. Of course they bear personal responsibility for their incorrigible unbelief. But you who are now Christians were also unconverted sinners just as they are, and yet Christ is precious to you, now. Who made you to differ from anyone else? What good thing do you have that you did not receive as a gracious gift from God to your unworthy soul?

Yes, Peter says that unbelievers who perish in their sins are disobedient, but he adds another reason besides that. Look at the end of verse eight. These Peter has in mind are “being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.” The Geneva Bible translation of 1560 says, “disobedient, unto the which thing they were even ordeined [ordained].” In other words, unlike you who are chosen by God for salvation, other particular individuals of the world who never believe in Christ, are appointed and ordained by God to their unbelief and disobedience!

In God’s eternal plan, He chooses some to be saved to display the glory of His mercy and appointed others to be lost to display the glory of His wrath. These people that Scripture calls “vessels for wrath” are “fitted” by God “to destruction,” as a potter makes one vessel for an honorable use and another from the very same lump for dishonorable use (Rom 9.21, 22). God is the potter and all humanity is the clay, and the sovereign Lord makes the difference which kind of a vessel you will become.

Now I know this is a hard saying but Peter's doctrine here is clear enough concerning the non-elect, also called the reprobate (which means rejected). John Gill explains it very well.

This passage, in connexion with the words preceding, plainly shows, that as there were some, whom God had appointed and fore-ordained to believe in Christ, on whom he determined to bestow true faith in him, to whom he is the elect, precious corner-stone; so there were others, whom he determined to leave as children of disobedience, in the infidelity and unbelief in which the fall had concluded them; through which disobedience or infidelity, they stumble at Christ, and his word, and in consequence thereof, justly perish (The Cause of God and Truth, 136).

The old Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) taught this same doctrine in these words:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished. . . . The rest of mankind [not elect], God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice (WCF 3.3, 4, 7).

We must break off the sermon here and finish the topic another time, but, in closing, let us feel more powerfully than ever that Christ is precious to us, dear brethren. You and I have only the free and sovereign grace of Jesus Christ to thank for our salvation. He did not save you because you believe. You believe because He was pleased to save you! You believe because you are eternally chosen by God for salvation. You believe because, despite the fact that you were an unbeliever like everyone else, you were not appointed to ruin for your sin like so many others are appointed, and there is nothing anyone can do about it!

I close with sacred verse from a seventh-century Latin hymn about our themes today:

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the Head and Cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever
And her confidence alone.

—TH #268

CHURCH, KNOW WHO YOU ARE (PART 2)

An Exposition of 1 Peter 2.4-10

The true church of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world is unique, completely separated unto God from all others in the world. As Christ's church, we have a unique spiritual identity. God's Word in 1 Peter 2.4-10 reveals that spiritual identity under five different aspects. As it does this, it describes Jesus' own unique spiritual identity. The church is what it is by virtue of our special relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter's doctrine is upheld by the whole biblical teaching, of course, but summarized in this passage of Scripture I've mentioned. Hear the biblical passage with all reverence now, because it is the Word of God, starting with 1 Peter 2.4.

⁴ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ⁵ ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷ Unto you therefore which believe *he is precious*: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, ⁸ and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. ⁹ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous 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.

Amen. May it please the Lord to bless our reading and hearing of His Word. To summarize the main idea of this passage, we address you here as Christ's church and say to you,

.....
Church, know who Christ is and who you are in relation to Christ.

Peter ranges through five basic characterizations of the church's identity in relation to Christ, with ample comments about His identity, too: 1) a temple, 2) a priesthood, 3) believers, 4) the new Israel, and 5) receivers of God's mercy. The first three we have considered together already. The last two are for today's sermon. But to review quickly, remember that the church, first of all, is

I. The Temple with Christ (vv. 4, 5a, 6a)

In these verses, Christ is the first and most important living stone, a foundation stone, and all those in Christ are living stones like He is and yet built upon Him. As people are converted and added to Christ's church, the temple not made with hands is being raised up, a holy habitation for God through the Spirit, where His glory dwells in a special way.

The church is also described here as

II. A Priesthood Through Christ (v. 5b)

Again, the identity of Christ is primary and our identity is bound up with our relationship to Him. He is the solitary High Priest who offered up His life and death as sacrifices to God, and also offers praises to God. We are believer-priests whose sacrifices are only acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, and our sacrifices are of a spiritual nature, not animals like those offered in the Old Testament era. We offer up ourselves in devotion to God, our

thanks for His gracious redemption, and even our financial giving for the sake of the gospel ministry is a spiritual sacrifice offered to God.

Reviewing, thirdly, the church is also characterized in our text as

III. Believers Prizing Christ (vv. 6b-8)

Christ who is objectively precious is esteemed as precious by all who truly belong to His church. We love Him because He first loved us. All three of these descriptions are ways in which true church members are distinguished from the world. We are the spiritual temple built upon Christ. We are the only worshippers in the world accepted by God because of Christ. And we are the only people also who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, a mark that His benediction or saving favor rests upon us (Eph 6.24).

Now we come to the fourth and fifth aspects of the church's identity in relation to Christ, found in verses nine and ten. We are the New Israel of Christ in verse nine, and we are God's people by His mercy through Christ in verse ten.

IV. The New Israel of Christ (v. 9)

Maybe you are not completely comfortable with the idea of calling Christ's church in this present age before He returns "the new Israel." There is a system of Bible interpretation which is very widespread among conservative churches known as Dispensationalism. One of its most famous proponents, Lewis Sperry Chafer, wrote—and listen to this carefully:

A mixture of the teachings concerning Israel, as a nation, with the revelations concerning the Church, the body of Christ, is groundless in Scripture. It is hopelessly confusing and grotesque, for under this plan only Israel's blessings are borrowed; her curses and penalties are, naturally, not wanted. No progress can be made in the kingdom studies unless plain words are taken in their obviously plain meaning. In the Bible "Israel" is not the "Church"; "Zion" is not the body of saints of this dispensation; the "throne of David" is not Heaven, nor will it ever be; the "land of your fathers" is not "Paradise" and the "house of Jacob" is not a host of Gentiles ignorantly attempting to force an entrance into Judaism. All such borrowed habits of interpretation must be faithfully judged and abandoned if ever the kingdom portions of God's Word are to assume any order or meaning (*The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, 1936, p. 16).

Now whatever good may be in Dr. Chafer's writings, this is not good, because by this standard, Peter himself would have to be judged as falling into serious doctrinal error. If Dr. Chafer's teaching is in fundamental conflict with the apostle Peter, I don't have to tell you which one is correct, do I?

Our verses under consideration now are a glorious "mixture of teachings concerning Israel, as a nation, with the revelations concerning the Church, the body of Christ!" How, then, can Chafer say this approach "is groundless in Scripture?" And this passage in 1 Peter 2 is only one of many examples to be found where language about Israel in the OT is applied to the church of Christ in the NT. Dr. Chafer objects on the grounds that "only Israel's blessings are borrowed," not her curses. That is because the OT nation of Israel, as a nation, was a type of the church. Her temporary blessings were foreshadowing the eternal blessings God had always planned for the spiritual seed of Abraham through the ultimate "Son of David," even our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me demonstrate to you that what I say is so from our verses today, starting with 1 Peter 2.9:

⁹ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

First, we must observe that the “ye” in this passage is the church of Christ, not OT Israel. Peter addresses this epistle “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” and upon these Peter pronounces the benediction of God’s saving favor, “Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1.1, 2). He further describes these people as born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance reserved in heaven for you, etc. (1.3-5). In our immediate passage the readers addressed are referred to as “you therefore which believe,” and you to which Jesus Christ “is precious” (2.6). Seeing the force of these labels, some interpreters have tried to say that Peter is writing only to Jewish Christians, justifying the terms normally associated with OT Israel. But that theory is patently false. While some of the readers may have been Jewish Christians, the evidence shows that most of them had been pagan, immoral Gentiles. In chapter four, verses three and four, Peter wrote to them this way,

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.

In other words, they *used to be* Gentiles, living like Gentiles, but now Peter considers them to be Gentiles no more! What else could they be, then? As Christians, they are now, spiritually, Jews, who compose the new and spiritual Israel! And the Jews who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ are spiritually Gentiles who belong to “the synagogue of Satan” (Rev 3.9). Jesus said to the Jews who refused to believe in Him, “Ye are of your father, the devil” (not Abraham, and not God; John 8.39, 42, 44). This teaching of Gentiles who become Christians being no longer Gentiles, but spiritual Jews, and Jews in the flesh really being Gentiles, spiritually speaking, is found in other places of Scripture. For example, Paul wrote to the church members at Corinth, “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (1 Cor 12.2). And to the Christians composing the church at Ephesus, largely Gentile converts, Paul wrote, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands” (Eph 2.11). And to the church of Christians at Rome, Paul wrote, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2.28, 29). And to the church of Christians in Philippi, Paul wrote, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3.3). And referring to the church in Galatians six, Paul wrote, “And as many as walk according to this rule [that physical circumcision is spiritually insignificant and what matters is being born again, v. 15], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6.16). There can be no doubt but that the church of Jesus Christ is here referred to as “the Israel of God,” that is, the true and spiritual Israel, the new Israel which is the full realization of the old Israel of the OT Scriptures and period.

The second observation from 1 Peter 2.9 to be made is that Peter uses language formerly applied to OT Israel to describe the spiritual identity of Christian believers who compose the church of Christ. And this is not subtle! Peter and Paul both had formerly gloried in their Jewishness after the old manner of thinking, but since Christ saved them and they had gospel light, they freely and frequently use that language with respect to Christ’s church in the NT. In this verse, Peter heaps up term after term after term that formerly had association only with OT Israel, and he insists that it is even more significantly true of the church.

Now to show you this, I must ask for your patience in this part of the sermon which really is a Bible study. But your investment of attention will be well worth it, as God blesses us, I assure you.

Peter uses four phrases, and then writes about the reason why the church is all these things in the plan of God. Let's take the phrases in order.

First, the church is "a chosen generation," or, "a chosen race," it could be translated. Now in the Greek translation of the OT, which Peter seems to have been quoting, the same phrase appears in Isaiah 43.20 in connection with God's promise to deliver the Jews from their exile in Babylon. Here's an English translation: "The beasts of the field shall bless me, the owls and young ostriches; for I have given water in the wilderness, and rivers in the dry land, to give drink to my chosen race, even my people whom I have preserved to tell forth my praises" (Isa 43.20, 21 Brenton LXX). The very same two Greek words are used, *genos* (race) and *eklektion* (chosen). Further, Isaiah's stated purpose for their being chosen, "to tell forth praises" of God, corresponds with the end of 1 Peter 2.9, "that ye should shew forth the praises" of God! It seems absolutely convincing that Peter deliberately took the language used in Isaiah 43 about the Jews in Babylon and used it with respect to the Christian church in the world!

The second, third, and fourth phrases state that the church is "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar [or special] people." This is language taken directly from Exodus 19.5, 6, again, likely the Greek translation: "Now if by hearing you listen to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be to me *a people special* above all nations. For the earth is mine. And you shall be for me *a royal priesthood* and *a holy nation*. These are the words you shall say to the sons of Israel" (New English Translation of the Septuagint, quoted by Jobes, BECNT, in loc.). The exact phrases "a royal priesthood" and "a holy nation" are of OT Israel in Exodus at the foot of Mount Sinai just before receiving the Ten Commandments through Moses, and of the NT Israel, Christ's church, here in 1 Peter. And the phrase, "a peculiar people," in the Greek language uses the same words for people and for peculiar, a term which means chosen, special (BAGD). That is stock terminology for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. For example, Deuteronomy 7.6 says to old Israel, "For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." What old Israel was in type and shadow, the New Testament church is in antitype and substance. Christ's holy church is the spiritual realization of OT Israel. The church is the New Israel.

Finally, in this verse, Peter explains why Christ's church is all these things in our spiritual identity. It is because we have a spiritual purpose in this world and the next. Here it is from the verse: "that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Once again, stock language about OT Israel is applied to the church, and here, with emphatic exaltation. Whereas the OT passage had Jehovah saying to Jews in Babylonian exile, "to tell forth my praises," Peter has, "the praises of him who hath called you," not merely out of literal Babylon, a geographical place of idolatry and heathen darkness back to the holy land of old Israel by the Jordan River, but "out of [spiritual] darkness into his marvellous [spiritual] light." Not a physical, geographical move is envisioned, but a spiritual deliverance from the realm of Satan to the kingdom of God and His grace.

For time's sake, we must handle the fifth aspect of the church's identity in verse ten more briefly, but I think once you understand how the language here works in general, the particulars will shine with a greater luster than ever before.

V. God's People by Mercy Through Christ (v. 10)

Verse ten says, "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." Naturally, Peter is still characterizing the same

group of people, namely, Christ's holy church, and he says two things about us. First, we were not "a people" (that is, a group that together was distinctively blessed), but now we are "the people of God." Second, Peter says we, prior to our identity as Christ's church, "had not obtained mercy" (i.e., from God), "but now" (note the strong contrast of our identity before and after), we "have obtained mercy."

Would it surprise you to learn that this phraseology, too, is rooted in the OT Scriptures with respect to old Israel? It is.

Here is the passage Peter references from the Old Testament: Hosea 2.23, which reads, "And I will sow her unto me in the earth; And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; And I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; And they shall say, Thou art my God." The OT prophet Hosea is exposing OT Israel's eighth-century BC apostasy from God and foretelling a day when God will save Israel from her sins.

One perceptive commentator explains that these words of Israel's salvation have several stages. The first stage is OT Israel's return from exile in the days of Cyrus through the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. The second stage was discerned by devout Jews in connection with the birth of Jesus as the Messiah in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to David and to the Jewish people through the prophets. The formation of the church is the third stage—referred to here in 1 Peter. The fourth and culminating stage is the return of Jesus Christ, the full display of God's sovereign love and perfect judgment (David Hubbard, TOTC, pp. 77-79). There is no escaping the linkage of OT Israel and its history with our Lord Jesus Christ as the hope of Israel and the NT church as the new Israel which is to be consummately blessed in and through Christ.

Brethren, it is very important that we think of ourselves as God teaches us to think. As Christ's church, we are His temple, His priests, His people that love Him, His new Israel, and His people that alone have found saving mercy in the world. Knowing these things will give us a much greater sense of our exalted privilege as the church of Jesus Christ, and of our holiness corporately and individually by God's doing as His chosen people in the world. May God grant us understanding from His Word and the faith to receive His truth in the love of it. Amen.