

THE BEREAN

"... examining the scriptures daily..." (Acts 17:11).

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The People of God

BY B. G. ECHOLS

No time in history has been more concerned about "self-image" than ours. Some falsely believe that if your image of yourself is well-adjusted, everything else will be fine. Self-image is important, but it has a spiritual aspect.

To have an adequate self-image we must live a life befitting our calling. Our image must be of what we are. "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Peter draws a contrast between disobedient and unbelieving Jews and Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles. Christians are given titles and privileges similar to those given to physical Israel in the Old Testament. The determining factor for Israel was a physical birth; for us it is a spiritual birth. The Cornerstone is elect and precious; the living stones built upon it are also elect. The whole church is one race begotten again of one Father. This gives us all an identity. It helps motivate us to service for God. Let us not forget who we are.

Our self-image can only be as good as our life.

"Royal" is applied either because we belong to Christ, the King; or because we are thought of as kings (Rev. 1:6). We are a priesthood because each Christian is a priest to offer sacrifices of praise to God. There is no clergy-laity concept in the New Testament. All are priests if they are in Christ. Let us be thankful and offer every day the sacrifices of prayer and praise. Let us renew each day the sacrifice of self (Heb. 13:5).

Israel was separated from the heathen and consecrated to God. Christians are one nation, under one king, separated to His service, dedicated to Him in life. We are holy because we are separated for His service. Although living in different lands under different forms of earthly government, we are all citizens of the one heavenly country and all sub-

jects of one Almighty King (Eph. 2:19). Because Christians are holy, they are different. They are different in what they believe about Christ and in what they do for Him.

The idea of being God's own possession is taken from Deut. 7:6. Isaiah also uses the idea to describe Israel (Isa. 43:21). Paul uses the same idea (Titus 2:14). We should have a sense of belonging to God. "A people" is a group of persons who are bound together by common sympathies and interests. These ties grow out of the great truths that led to kinship in Christ. God has now chosen us to be the Israel of God. I am amazed that so many sectarian preachers still refer to the Jews as God's chosen people.

Our whole lives as Christians must be a manifestation of what the apostle calls "the excellencies" of God. All that God has done for us - making us an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession - had as its objective that we should show forth His excellencies. God is love, and that should be known. We should show it forth. We should publish it abroad. His character should pour into every heart that every heart may be gladdened and blessed forever. Every man who has received anything from God is a steward to

impart it to others. Thus we are not saved for ourselves alone, but to share.

The very existence of the church is a standing witness to the excellencies of God Who called us out of darkness. The world's ideas of God will be drawn from us. The existence of the church proclaims God's excellencies. If the church had less than the excellencies of God to preserve it, it would have failed long ago. The purpose of the church's existence is to manifest the glory of God, and by so doing, praise Him. We praise God best when we set forth what He is. There is no Christian who cannot in some simple and even feeble way show forth the excellencies of God in word and deed. Let us use our opportunities and talents for the Master, not for self praise. This requires that we know of the excellencies of God. They are revealed to us in Christ (Jn. 14:9).

The character of Christians proclaims God's excellencies. They walk in the light. God's excellencies are praised by our works and words, especially in preaching the gospel. Unexpressed thanksgiving is no thankfulness at all. Let us not be silent recipients of His grace.

Darkness is a symbol of ignorance and sin (Jn. 3:19; Rom. 13:12). The Gentiles walked in utter spiritual darkness, but the Jews were not much better. Since Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, his work was described as calling them from darkness (Acts 26:18). Passing from darkness to light is an especially appropriate way to describe the conversion of anyone, especially Gentiles of that era. The light of His presence is marvelous. Marvelous means extraordinary and wonderful. Those who walk in it feel some of its glory.

Sometimes it profits us to look back to see what we were before we obeyed the gospel. This makes us more appreciative of what we are now. "Who in times past were no people, but now are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:10). This was a prophecy in Hosea 2:23. The application is to those who were Gentiles, but now are in Christ. The contrast is between what they were and what they are now. The message of God's love reached their hearts, and thus by God's mercy they were numbered among His people, pardoned and cleansed. Is that the image you have of yourself?

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