

The Believer's Privileges, Part 6: Separation, Possession, Illumination...

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9b–10

Code: 60-22

INTRODUCTION

Peter wrote 1 Peter to scattered Christians who were experiencing difficult circumstances. They were paying the price of living out their Christian lives in a hostile world. First Peter 2:4-10 contains the heart of the encouragement we find in Peter's first epistle. It is a description of the spiritual privileges God has given all believers by His grace.

Perhaps when you were a child you had a little kaleidoscope. And when you turned its end you would have seen different beautiful images formed. In this passage Peter took the simple truths of salvation and rotated them like you might rotate the end of a kaleidoscope. Those simple and magnificent truths are transformed into patterns beautiful beyond description. Each time we observe a turn of Peter's kaleidoscope, we see another arrangement of the marvelous privileges that are ours in Christ. There's nothing about duty here; it's all about privilege. Review

I. THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (v. 4)

II. THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (vv. 5-10)

A. Union (v. 5a)

B. Access (v. 5b)

C. Security (v. 6)

D. Affection (vv. 7-8)

E. Election (v. 9a)

F. Dominion (v. 9b) Lesson

G. Separation (v. 9c)

"You are . . . a holy nation. "

Christians are a "nation" (Gk. , *ethnos*, from which we get the word *ethnic*). More than that, we are a "holy nation. " That means we are a people separated or set apart.

1. The message of holiness

a) The Old Testament precedent(1) The calling of IsraelWe find quotations and allusions to the Old Testament throughout 1 Peter 2:4-10. By describing the church as "a holy nation," Peter was drawing on God's description of Israel in Exodus 19:6: "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. " Similar descriptions of God's people are found in Leviticus 19:2; 20:26; Deuteronomy 7:6; and Isaiah 62:12. (2) The failure of IsraelBut Israel's history was tragic. By unbelief the nation forfeited the great privilege of belonging uniquely to God. b) The New Testament parallelThe tragedy of Israel's apostasy became a blessing for the Gentiles according to Romans 11:7-12. God now has a new unique people--the church, consisting of both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11-12). The church will remain God's unique people until the nation of Israel as a whole turns in faith to the Messiah.

2. The meaning of holiness

Holiness means that we have been set apart unto God. While that includes being set apart for service, the primary emphasis is our relationship with God. In salvation God does the inconceivable: He draws wicked, vile sinners to Himself. He takes them out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13) , and out of communion with Satan and demons into communion with Himself. The theological word often used to describe

that reality is sanctification. As a holy nation, we are separated from what is unholy and devoted to God.

3. The means of holiness

We were made holy by means of God's choice. First Peter 1:1-2 says we "are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that [we] may obey Jesus Christ and be [in a covenant relationship with Him by being] sprinkled with His blood. "Salvation is the work of God by which we are set apart. We are set apart not just from sin and hell, but to an intimate relationship with God. That new relationship is manifested by obedience to God produced by the Holy Spirit. Therefore we are "born again to a living hope" by the Word, which the Spirit applies to our hearts in salvation (1 Pet. 1:3). a) Acts 15:7-9--Peter said to the apostles and elders, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them [the Gentiles], giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. " That is a picture of what it means to be sanctified--to be holy, cleansed of sin, set apart from sin, and set apart unto God. b) Hebrews 10:10--"By this [God's will] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. " Sanctification goes hand-in-hand with salvation. c) Hebrews 10:14-15--"By one offering [Christ on the cross] He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us. " Sanctification is bound up in salvation. You became part of the holy nation by the Spirit's work of salvation in you. d) 1 Corinthians 1:30--"By [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. "

4. The progress of holiness

a) Sanctification is progressive(1) The explanation Sanctification is more than just a state of being. It is a progressive pattern of life. When the Holy Spirit set us apart unto God, we became His special possession. That doesn't mean we will never sin again, but it does mean we are no longer in bondage to sin, the devil, and death. That's positional sanctification. Beyond positional sanctification lies progressive sanctification--the change that occurs in our pattern of life through the power of the Spirit. When the Spirit of God sets us apart unto God, we begin to live for God. We begin a process of being progressively separated from the sin that once dominated us. That's why 1 Peter 1:2 says we have been sanctified and that 1 Peter 1:15-16 says we are to be sanctified. Sanctification involves both positional and progressive aspects. Positional sanctification means that we were taken out of the kingdom of darkness and placed into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It can no longer be said that the devil is our Father. Rather, our Father is God Himself. We belong to Him and are separated from the penalty of sin. The progressive reality of sanctification is that we now live a life more and more conformed to God's holiness. We bring out in our living the reality of our position. We could say that we are becoming what we already are in Christ. (2) The exhortations(a) 1 Thessalonians 4:3--"This is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. " Paul spoke here of progressive sanctification. Of the three kinds of sanctification--positional, progressive, and ultimate--only in ultimate sanctification do we become completely like Christ. In the life to come we will be totally set apart to Him. At salvation we are given the privilege of being set apart unto God to be His possession. (b) Romans 6:6--"Our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. " Because we are no longer in uncontrollable bondage to sin, we need to start living like that. (c) Acts 20:32--Paul said, "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. " The eternal inheritance Paul spoke of belongs to all who are saved, and all who are saved are also sanctified. (d) Acts 26:17-18--The Lord said to Paul, "I am sending you, to open their [the Gentile's] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. " Here we see a

close connection between sanctification and salvation. By faith we are sanctified, saved, forgiven, receive an inheritance, go from darkness to light, and turn from the dominion of Satan to God. We have the wonderful privilege of being a holy people. We've been set apart to God and are no longer owned by Satan. We are no longer victims in bondage to sin because we have entered into a new relationship. We work toward living in the light of that holy identity--progressively living up to our position. Sin is a disaster in our lives because it is so contrary to our union with Christ. It defies everything about our character as a holy people set apart unto God.

b) Sanctification is practical(1) What it's not(a) The separation of a monkPractical sanctification does not require that we isolate ourselves from the world. That would take care of our outer circumstances, but not the corruption that resides in the heart. Monkish externalism will not transform anyone's life. (b) The separation of a PhariseeThe Pharisees also attempted to achieve holiness through external means. But they only whitewashed what was on the inside--the spiritual equivalent of dead men's bones (Matt. 23:27). A Pharisee painted the outside but was wretched on the inside. He circumspectly observed legalistic practices, but there was no inward transformation. (c) The separation of a StoicSanctification is not achieved by the Stoic who believes it is a serious sin to be happy. Walking around with a dour look on one's face, presupposing that must imply a grave seriousness of mind, is a sickening piosity that is wholly external. That too will not transform one's inner life. (2) What it isPractical sanctification involves cultivating an effective personal intimacy with Christ. We are a people set apart unto Christ both positionally and personally. All Christians are on intimate terms with their Savior. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. " A sanctified heart will cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 6:17 says, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. " Because we have been joined to Christ, immorality is a particularly vile thing for us as Christians. It actually joins Christ to our immoral acts (1 Cor. 6:15-16). As part of a holy nation are both positionally and intimately set apart to Christ. Holiness will show in our lives only when we know Christ intimately. However, many are trying to live the Christian life apart from the living Christ, depending on quasi-Christian psychology. Introspection, improvement in one's self-image, and self-analysis are no substitute for intimacy with Christ, which is what compels us toward holiness.

H. Possession (v. 9d)

"You are . . . a people for God's own possession. "

This reflects Exodus 19:5: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples. " Peter might also have been thinking about Isaiah 43:21: "The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise" (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal. 3:17). The Greek word translated "possession" means "to acquire," "purchase," or "acquire for a price. " We find it in Ephesians 1:14, which speaks of "the redemption of God's own possession. " We are God's own possession because He paid the price.

1. Acts 20:28--"The church . . . [was] purchased with [Christ's] own blood. "
2. 1 Corinthians 6:20--"You have been bought with a price. " That price was the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Titus 2:14--Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem [or purchase] us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession. " God by sovereign election chose us and by the sacrifice of Christ paid the price to buy us back. Therefore we are God's personal possessions.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me" (John 10:14). I remember sitting in seminary chapel and sing one of my favorite hymns, "I Am His and He Is mine" by the nineteenth-century lyricist Wade Robinson. From the early days of my seminary education, I acquired a special love for the thought that I belong to Christ. As Christians we enjoy the privilege of belonging wholly to God.

I. Illumination (v. 9e)

"That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. "

1. The meaning of darkness

The darkness we have been called out of is the disastrous state of sin. The unregenerate remain in that state, which is the darkness of Satan, who is the prince of darkness (cf. John 14:30; Eph. 6:12). It consists primarily of two things: ignorance and immorality. The unregenerate are in an intellectual darkness that prevents them from seeing the truth. And they are in a moral darkness that prevents them from knowing and acting on what is right.

2. The means of deliverance

a) The call of God But Peter affirms that the regenerate--Christians--have been called out of darkness. The word translated "called" refers to the saving initiative of God. In the New Testament epistles it does not refer to God's general call to the masses of humanity, but the effectual call of God that always ends in salvation. b) The transformation of a believer It is our privilege to have been called out of darkness into the light. Where once we were in intellectual and moral darkness, now we understand the truth and have the ability to do right. We have a true knowledge of God and obey Him. Those two qualities are absent in the lives of the unregenerate. In salvation we were rescued from ignorance of God's will and the inability to perform it. That transition can be easily forgotten. The longer we're Christians, the harder it becomes to remember what we were like before we knew Christ. How Deep Is the Darkness! Satan's darkness is so pervasive that the unregenerate can be described as people in darkness and people of darkness. They actually love the darkness. John 3:19 says, "This is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. " No one can come to a knowledge of God's light by himself. A person can be an atheist and never give serious thought to the light of God because darkness does not comprehend the light (John 1:5). The depth of spiritual darkness is profound. We depend completely on God to call us out of that darkness.

J. Compassion (v. 10)

"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. "

The book of Hosea tells us that the prophet's adulterous wife "gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to him, 'Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I should ever forgive them. But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen. ' When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said, 'Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not Your God. Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, "You are not My people," it will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God"" (1:6-10).

1. The people of God's mercy

Peter applied an Old Testament description of Israel to the New Testament church. Paul did the same thing in Romans 9:25-26: "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' and her who was not beloved, 'Beloved. ' And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God" (cf. Hos. 2:23; 1:10). Peter and Paul referred to the church as those "who were once not a people, but now are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:10; Rom. 9:25-26). That is particularly true of those in the church who are Gentiles. When God said we were not His people but would become His people, He meant that He was going to extend His mercy to us. According to 1 Peter 1:10, we were once not God's people because we had not received God's mercy. God's mercy is His compassion for His people. That is why we can say that we enjoy the spiritual privilege of compassion from our Lord.

2. The meaning of God's mercy

Mercy is the same thing as compassion. The concept is sometimes translated "lovingkindness" in the Old Testament. Because of God's compassion, He withholds the just punishment of our sin. a) General mercy There are two kinds of mercy exercised by God. One is general mercy. That is seen in God's working in the creative order, such as God's providential care for all mankind. God's patience and pity benefit all sinners, even though God has every right to destroy those who don't know Him. (1) Lamentations 3:22--"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. " Everyone benefits from the Lord's compassion. (2) Psalm 145:9--"The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. " It is because of God's mercy that people aren't immediately consumed by God's wrath. b) Special mercy (1) A special effect However, 1 Peter 2:10 speaks not about general mercy, but the special mercy of God extended to the elect. It is a unique mercy and totally undeserved by those who enjoy it. For some people God is generally merciful--He alleviates the present full potential for judgment caused by the disaster of sin, but only in this life. For others God alleviates that judgment forever--those who are elect. They receive not only general mercy in this life but also special mercy in the life to come. God bestows His special compassion on the elect by forgiving their sin, while in the case of the unregenerate He simply withholds judgment until the future. (2) A special choice God chooses to extend His special compassion because it is His pleasure to do so. Because He is a God of love He chose to love the elect. (a) Micah 7:18--"Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?" (b) Romans 9:15, 20--God said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I have compassion. . . . The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" (3) A special reason It is not the wretchedness of the sinner that causes God to show mercy. God does not show compassion because He feels sorry for sinners or is emotionally distraught over their predicament. If that was what caused God to extend His mercy, He would be obligated to extend mercy to all. Its not because some sinners are more worthy of mercy than others that God extends His mercy. If that were the reason for God's compassion, He wouldn't be extending mercy; He'd be meeting an obligation. But God's mercy means that He is holding back the just punishment that all men deserve. God is not merciful to some because Christ made it possible for Him to be merciful. But we had been chosen by His uninfluenced sovereign love before the world began. The Theologian A. W. Pink observed that mercy arises solely from God's imperial pleasure (The Doctrines of Election and Justification [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974], cf. p. 55). God showed mercy to us simply because He chose to do so. That should escalate your sense of being a privileged person! (a) Psalm 57:10--"Thy mercy is great unto the heavens" (KJV). (b) Psalm 103:3--"Great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (KJV). It is God's mercy that saves us and grants us an eternal inheritance. (c) 2 Corinthians 1:3--"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort. " (d) Titus 3:5--"[God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy. " (e) Psalm 136:1, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (KJV). (f) Psalm 59:16, "I will sing aloud of [God's] mercy in the morning" (KJV).

K. Proclamation (v. 9e)

"That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. "

While this privilege returns us to verse 9, conceptually it must be addressed last because it explains the purpose of all our privileges in Christ: "that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of Him. "

Christians enjoy the high privilege of being ambassadors of the living God.

1. The meaning of proclamation The Greek word translated "proclaim" is used only here in the New Testament. It's a very unusual word meaning "to advertise" or "to publish. " It meant that something was to be told that would otherwise be unknown. "Excellencies" speak of the ability to do heroic deeds. So Christians have the privilege of telling what the world would otherwise not know concerning God's heroic deeds. 2. The purpose of proclamation God has the ability to do mighty and

powerful acts. Peter was not referring to excellencies as attributes or intrinsic qualities, but as powerful and heroic deeds. We would all feel it was an honor if we were chosen to be an ambassador of the United States. We would represent this nation's power and abilities. But we have been chosen to be ambassadors of the living God, who is able to do heroic deeds on a miraculous scale. When you have an opportunity to speak about who you represent, you can say, "I have the privilege of announcing the mighty and heroic deeds of the living God who has called me into His service." According to Paul, we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). We have been given the Holy Spirit and now are witnesses for God. What a great privilege!

Conclusion The reason we have all those glorious privileges is that we are in Christ. We are in union with God because we are in Christ and Christ is one with God. We have access to the Father's glorious presence because we have access through Christ. We are secure in our relationship to God because we are in Christ and He is secure in His relationship to God--He is part of the triune Godhead. We have affection for our Lord because His love has been shed abroad in our hearts, and we love Him because He first loved us. We have been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. We have dominion because we reign with Him. We are a separate, holy nation because we are holy in Him. We are the possession of God because we are in Christ, who is God's own Son. We walk in the light because we are in Him who is light itself. We have received compassion from God because Jesus Christ died for us and God loves us in Christ. And we proclaim His excellencies through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ." We can look around us and see only a motley bunch of erstwhile sinners who deserve eternal damnation, but because we are in Christ we have been granted incredible spiritual privileges. Therefore we should be eternally grateful.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did Peter mean when he described Christians as a "holy nation"?
2. Whom had God referred to in the past as a holy nation?
3. Who are God's unique new people?
4. Holiness means that we have been _____ unto God.
5. What is positional sanctification?
6. What change occurs in progressive sanctification?
7. Why is sin a disaster in the life of a Christian?
8. What does practical sanctification involve?
9. When God spoke of a people of His own possession in the Old Testament, to whom was He referring?
10. How was the church purchased, and to whom do all Christians belong?
11. What is the darkness we have been called out of?
12. What are two things that characterize that darkness?
13. The unregenerate are both people in darkness and people _____?
14. Why can it be said that Gentile Christians were once not a people?
15. What two kinds of mercy does God extend to sinners?
16. Why does God extend mercy to sinners?
17. What meanings are associated with the word translated "proclaim" in verse 9?
18. What are Christians to proclaim?
19. For what purpose God has gifted us with the privileges Peter enumerated in 1 Peter 2:4-10?

Pondering the Principles

1. In the church today the need for personal and corporate holiness is often downplayed. Sin in the body of believers is considered by many to be part of the norm. David said that "the Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates" (Ps. 11:5, NIV). Over a hundred years ago the Anglican bishop J. C. Ryle wrote, "A right knowledge of sin lies at the root of

all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, [and] sanctification, are 'words and names' which convey no meaning to the mind" (Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots [Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1984 reprint], p. 1). Do you have God's perspective of sin--that it is a horror and a disaster, and something to be hated?

2. Our study has affirmed the good position and privileges we enjoy because of the goodness of our God. Thomas Watson wrote, "God is the quintessence of all good things, He is superlatively good. The soul seeing a super-eminency in God, and admiring in Him that constellation of all excellencies, is carried out in love to Him in the highest degree. The measure of our love to God . . . must be to love Him without measure" (All Things for Good [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986 reprint], p. 71). As you reflect on God's goodness to you, pray that He will increase your love for Him that you may be more closely bound to Him.

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