



## **“The People Of God”**

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Since God is the Creator of the universe and everything within it, in one sense, everything belongs to Him. Nothing is outside of His sovereign governance. But the church belongs to God in a unique way. God’s chosen people have a relationship to God that others simply do not enjoy, and that has great implications for how we are to think and live as the people of God. Our scripture reading comes from **Deuteronomy 14** where Moses is giving the children of Israel laws to regulate their conduct—many of which were designed to keep them away from idolatry and the spiritual pollution of the world around them.

**Deuteronomy 14:1-2 “Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.”**

The prohibitions of **verse 1** pertain to the practice of pagans in that day. God’s people were not to participate in idolatrous practices, and they were not to become entangled with those who worshipped other gods and thus, lose their identity and peculiarity. Just as the nation of Israel constituted God’s chosen people in the Old Testament dispensation, the church constitutes the Israel of God or the people of God today—a people for God’s possession. What does that mean? How are we to be *a peculiar people* for God’s possession?

Throughout the stream of time, God has had a people separated for Himself. After the fall, God said that the godly seed would come from Seth the son of Adam, as opposed to Cain. Beginning right there in the opening chapters of **Genesis**, we can begin to trace that promised seed line through the pages of **Genesis** and throughout the Old Testament until finally Jesus Christ was born into this world in the fullness of time. When God called Abram to follow Him in faith, God began to deal with the people on a

national level. He promised to make a great nation out of Abram's descendants. This people would later become known as Israel. They would be a special nation and people with whom God would have a covenant. He would bless them and deal with them and work through them to bring Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and Redeemer of mankind into the world. God had a law, the Old Testament law including the ten commandments given to Moses, that He gave to the people to govern over them and consequently separate them as his people during that age of time (**Ephesians 2**).

In our text, Moses tells the people of Israel how God had set them apart as a peculiar people and he reminds them of three things that resulted in them being a people for God's possession. First, their adoption: **"Ye are the children of the LORD your God" (verse 1)**. Just like all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus today are the children of God by faith (**Galatians 3**). Secondly, their election: **"...the LORD hath chosen thee..." (verse 2)**. This means that out of all the nations of the earth, God chose this particular nation to be the vehicle of service through which to bring His purposes for all of humanity to pass. Just like God has chosen the church today to be His special people. Thirdly, he points to their sanctification: **"...thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God..." (verse 2)**. The word *holy* here means *sacred* or *set apart*. They were sanctified or set apart to be God's holy people and to serve Him and Him alone. This means they were to be different from the people around them. They were to be reserved for God's service and for God's purposes. In so doing, they would be a light to the Gentile nations around them and ultimately, the world would be drawn to God through the service of the nation of Israel, and the world could eventually, through Christ, be redeemed.

It's interesting that the word *holy* does not appear in the Bible until Moses was called to establish Israel as a nation in **Exodus 2**. But from then until Moses had finished giving them the law (as recorded from **Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**), Moses used the word *holy* at least 207 times. That tells me that God expected His people to be a holy people, and sincerely following the law of God causes people to be holy. Being devoted to God and keeping His will is one of the things that sets God's people apart from the people of the world. Back then, God expected His people to distinguish themselves by divine dedication and a singular focus on keeping His commandments, thus separating themselves from all the nations around them. Just as He expects the church today (*spiritual* Israel) to separate itself spiritually from the world in the way that we think, talk, and behave. We are in the world, of course, but not of the world. We are to be different from and separated from the world.

The church today is God's true Israel, and we like ancient Israel are to be a separate people, made so by our blood-bought relationship to Jesus Christ and the new covenant that He established with the church. But ancient Israel did not maintain her peculiarity and her sacred identity for very long. They were a miserable failure in this regard and as a result, they suffered throughout their history. Often today, God's people are not very good at maintaining our peculiarity either. We tend to compromise and become tainted by the world around us and we lose our identity as the Lord's people.

Not long after God brought the Israelites to the land of Canaan and they settled there, the Bible says that Israel became rich, well fed, and fat, but then they forsook God (**Deuteronomy 32:15-16**). They quickly began to lose their peculiarity as the people of God. But why did this happen? For the same reasons it happens to the church today. First of all, Israel lost their desire to please and honor God, rather desiring to be like the nations around them. For example, God wanted to be their king. When God established them as a nation, He was to be their king and to rule over them. God provided a system of judges on earth to execute His rule throughout their land. But they began to notice that all the other nations had earthly kings, so they wanted one, too. Their prophet, Samuel, warned them that this would be a disaster.

**I Samuel 8:19-20 “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.”**

You see, they were not content to simply be God’s people and to allow His law to guide and govern them. They wanted to appear sophisticated and in step with the modern world around them, so they cried out for a king. As a result, they rued the day because they rejected the Lord’s plan and His system of government.

The church has found itself in trouble today because of the same worldly desire to be like others us. When that becomes our aim and our desire, we’re going to drift from God and get in trouble with God every time. Do you realize that nearly every innovation and departure from the Bible pattern that has disrupted the peace and purity of the church down through the ages—and there have been many—is the result of people looking at the other religious organizations around and the trends of the world and the thinking of the world and wanting to conform and follow along?

Friend, if you trace the history of the church from Pentecost to present, you’ll find that it never took very long for God’s people to leave the teaching of the truth and the Bible for the doctrines and practices of men. Much of what is practiced in the religious world today is not practiced because it is taught in the New Testament by command, precept, or example. It is practiced because it is according to the annals of tradition, or a part of a church creed that men have written because foolish man has invented it and substituted it for the practice of Christ and his apostles. Today, the church is besieged by doctrinal liberalism and innovation in its work and worship until many of you can testify to the fact that the church in your community is becoming unrecognizable to what it once was—simply because some want to keep in step with the religious world around us.

Some in the church have been influenced by the world’s thinking until we’ve lost our way in the things of God. We’ve lost our identity as the people of God. Such got ancient Israel in trouble and it’s getting us into trouble today as well. When we set aside God’s arrangements and what we CAN read in the New Testament for things that we CANNOT read in the New Testament, we surely will lose our identity and our peculiarity as the Lord’s people.

The people of old also lost their peculiarity because they lacked knowledge. Such was the complaint that God lodged against them in **Hosea**.

**Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”**

**Isaiah 5:13 “Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge...”**

So great was their lack of knowledge that **II Kings 22:8** tells us how that during the reign of King Josiah, there was a period of time in which the book of the law was lost in the house of the Lord. That was a terrible thing, a terrible loss because God’s word was lost for so long that when it was finally uncovered and read, it was a new, strange, and disturbing thing to them. During the days when the book of the law was lost, sin increased until their rebellion and apostasy finally took them into exile. And that’s what happens when people lose their knowledge of the word of God today.

There is an alarming lack of knowledge in the church today. Truth be told, to many a church member, the Bible is a lost book because they rarely read it—much less study it. They don't understand how to read and apply the scriptures because they've never dedicated themselves to learning how. At times in my preaching, I've almost hesitated to preach some things, thinking that *everybody who is a Christian should know that and it almost seems redundant to say it again*. But I've learned that a preacher should never take for granted what his hearers know because even many a church member is woefully unaware of what the Bible says and teaches. (I'm speaking of people who have been members for many years!) Consequently, many of our lives are filled with worldliness, compromise, and sin. The church, like Israel of old, stands in great peril today. The book of God has in no way been lost from our sight. Our culture is saturated with Bibles and bible study helps right at our fingertips. No, it may not be lost from our sight, but tragically it is lost from our minds and hearts. When that is the case, the people of God lose their way and lose their identity just like the people of old.

Lastly, Israel lost its peculiarity because of indifference.

**Jeremiah 6:15 “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush...”**

Here were a people so accustomed to sin that it didn't bother them. They weren't concerned or alarmed by their sin; they simply shrugged it off.

**Amos 6:1 “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...”**

Here again, the people had become rich, secure, and complacent. Bro. Don King, a preacher and friend of mine from California, has long said that he's not sure which comes first: worldliness or indifference--but where you find one, you'll sooner or later find the other. I think that's very true. Jesus condemned the lukewarm church in Laodicea which was rich and increased with goods and thought it had need of nothing. But the Lord found their attitude so disgusting that He declared He would spew them out of His mouth (**Revelation 3:16**).

Some today are indifferent toward what the Bible says. It really doesn't matter what the scriptures teach; if they want to do it, think it, wear it, drink it, be a part of it...then they do, and that's that. To some, the church and it's work really don't mean very much. That's easily seen in their lackadaisical attitude and attendance of its services, aloof involvement in its work, and cynical attitude toward its teaching.

**Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”**

You see, God's people are to be a people for God's possession. We are to be his sole property, a separated and holy people, different and easily distinguishable from the people of the world. So, what does it mean to be a people for God's possession? In what ways are the people of God to be peculiar and different? First, I'd suggest that we should be different in speech. God's people are to talk a different way from those around us. I don't just mean by abstaining from profanity and filthy language. Our speech should be sanctified in other ways as well, by the things we talk about and the way in which

we talk about them. We should esteem and revere holy things and speak about them with respect and reverence. Our vocabulary should come from heaven's dictionary and not from the vulgar, uninformed language of the world.

**Titus 2:7-8 "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."**

**I Peter 4:11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."**

That is, *to speak as God has spoken*. We should be concerned about using scriptural language to refer to the things of God, calling Bible things by Bible names. Mark it down: when we fail to do this, we end up devaluing and drifting away from the truth itself. You may recall the predicament of the ancient Jews when they returned from Babylon.

**Nehemiah 13:24 "And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."**

They had intermarried with nations that God had forbidden them from becoming involved with. As a result, they lost their identity, even in the languages which they spoke. You know, today, many of the terms you hear used in religion are not scriptural terms. They are picked up from the denominational world and the religious world, but they're not Bible terms and they convey false ideas. For example, nowhere does the Bible refer to preachers as 'reverend,' but most people call preachers that. The Bible doesn't teach that. Nor does the Bible teach that preachers are to be called 'pastors.' That is a scriptural term, but it refers to an elder in the local congregation, which is usually distinguished from a preacher or evangelist. There are many other examples we could cite if time permitted. It matters what we call things. It matters how we refer to things and the type of language that we use. Words matter in God's economy. God's people maintain their unique identity in part through pure speech.

We are also told to be separate in doctrine. It does indeed matter what the church believes and preaches. God is in no way indifferent to what people believe about His word and what it teaches. One belief, one faith, one church, one religious organization is not as right or valid as the next one.

**Titus 2:1 "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:"**

So, what constitutes *sound doctrine*, Paul? He answers that.

**II Timothy 1:13 "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."**

So, you see, *sound doctrine* for the Christian can be found in the New Testament in the writings of Christ's apostles and only in the New Testament. When God's people compromise with religious error and give in to any wind of doctrine in order to keep the peace or for whatever reason, we actually betray the Lord and we lose our peculiarity as His people.

Lastly, we're certainly to be particular in the way that we live our lives.

**Philippians 1:27 “Only let your conversation (or *manner of life*) be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...”**

**Titus 2:10 “Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”**

The Christian’s life is to be set apart. It is to be visibly and noticeably different. If you consider yourself to be a Christian, a child of God, I want to ask you something very seriously. Be completely honest with yourself, as I need to be completely honest with myself. When the people that you meet day by day—whether at work, school, your neighbors, even at the grocery store or along the sidewalk—meet you or are in your presence, do they immediately sense or see something different about you? I don’t just mean that you engage in religious talk or wear a special costume or perhaps a cross around your neck or a scripture on a t-shirt. I mean do they look at your manner of life—the way you act, the way you talk, the attitude you express, the way you dress. For example, the Bible teaches that women are to adorn themselves in *modest dress* and are to wear the kind of clothing that *professes godliness* (**I Timothy 2:9-10**). Do people see that you resist the immodest and often lascivious styles of clothing that the world is so unashamed to wear today? Are there things that people recognize that you will not do? Conduct that you refuse to participate in because it’s not godly, pure, or holy conduct that represents God and His righteousness? You see, we are to belong to God and Him alone. The church is a distinct and peculiar people for His possession.

**Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”**

That means *don’t let the world put you into its mold*.

**II Corinthians 6:17 “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord...”**

Only is so doing and so being can we be a people for God’s own possession.

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