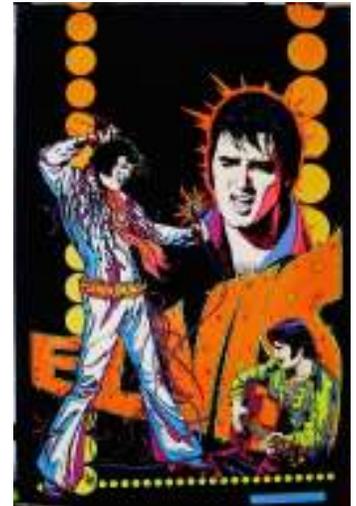


The Tapestry of Identity



Identity is an issue we all have to deal with, daily. And, identity is a dynamic that drives us, behaviorally. Identity is unique for every individual, yet it draws us together corporately. Identity also is something



else. Think of it as a rich tapestry woven together from many threads, into a pattern that becomes our identity. A number of threads weave themselves into our identity tapestry: Our race/ethnic group, our gender, our income, our employment/work, our accomplishments, our morality, our family background and dynamics, our education, our physical appearance/body image, our web of relationships, our sexual orientation, our religious orientation, our nationality, our political perspective, and our cultural affiliation –depending on the emphases and intensity of the threads, the tapestry looks different for all of us, and we fly our tapestry like a flag or hang it on the walls of our homes. But there’s another set of threads that should be both considered and woven together into a *different* tapestry and made into a different flag of identity. These threads come from the Bible, and as consider WHO and WHAT the BIBLE says we are, the flag Christians we plant in the soil of our lives and hang in our homes and on our porches is the flag of Biblical identity. Let’s consider some biblical threads from *1 Peter 2:9-10* that together weave a tapestry we would do well to display in our lives. This is corporate, yet applies to us as individuals which share that corporate identity.

1. You are a **CHOSEN RACE.**

According to this verse, is race racial? So then, what is the core that identifies this thread in the tapestry of our lives? For what reason are we part of what this verse says we are? How should we respond to this?

I know that this is a corporate identity, he's talking about the church—the true Israel. But the implication is individual, because this race is not racial. The chosen race is not black or white or red or yellow or brown. The chosen race is a new people from all the peoples—all the colors and cultures—who are now aliens and strangers among in the world. See verse 11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers . . . "

What gives us our identity is not color or culture. But chosen-ness. Christians are not the white race; they are the chosen race. Christians are not the black race; they are the chosen race. We are the black chosen and the white chosen and the yellow chosen and the red chosen. Out from all the races we have been chosen—one at a time, not on the basis of belonging to any group.

That's why this amazing phrase is individually crucial for you; you are part of the "chosen race" because the race is made up of individuals who were chosen—from all the races. So your first identity is that you are chosen. God chose you. Not because of your race—or for any other qualification—God chose you. Who am I? I am chosen. I do not know why. It was nothing in me of value above other humans. I did not earn it or merit it, or meet any conditions to get it. It happened before I was born. I stand in awe of it. I tremble with joy at it. I bow and accept it. I long to be faithful to its purpose. What's unique about the Christian race is, in that race which knows no boundaries, I am chosen!

2. You are an OBJECT of God's MERCY.

What was my condition when I was saved? What does this say about God's involvement in my life? How does / should this affect my identity?

I choose the word "pitied" because the word for mercy in Greek here is a verb and the closest word we have in English like "mercied" is "pitied." It's not a bad translation. When God chose us, he then saw us in our sin and guilt and condemnation and he pitied us. We are not just chosen. We are pitied. We are the not just the objects of his choice, but the objects of his mercy.

I am chosen and I am pitied—or you could say I am "graced." I am "loved." God did not just choose me and stand aloof. He chose me and then drew near in mercy to help me and save me. My identity is fundamentally this: I have been shown mercy. I

am a "mercied" person. I get my identity not first from my actions, but from being acted upon—with pity. I am a pitied one.

3. You are God's TREASURED POSSESSION.

In what sense does God own everybody, yet own us in a different way? What light does *2 Corinthians 6:16* shed on this "ownership"?

This is expressed twice. *Verse 9: "You are . . . a people for God's own possession."*
Verse 10a: "You once were not a people, but now you are the people of God."

You are chosen by God; you are pitied by God; and the effect of that pity—that mercy—is that God takes you to be his own possession. Now God owns everything. So in one sense everyone is God's possession. So this must mean something special. And, of course, it does. You are God's TREASURED people, His inheritance. You are the ones he has chosen from the mass of humanity past, present, and future and desires to spend eternity with. When God says (in *2 Corinthians 6:16*), "I will be their God and they will be my people [my possession]," what he means is that "I will dwell in them and walk among them."

You are chosen; you are pitied; you are God's possession—the ones he will walk among and reveal himself to in a personal relation forever.

4. You are God's HOLY / SET APART / DEDICATED people.

How does being this kind of people "expand" who you are? What does it mean to be "holy"? Is holiness a requirement or a result of who you are?

Verse 9: "You are a . . . holy nation."

You have been chosen and grace and possessed by God; and therefore you are part of a world-wide nation of people not limited by geography only and not like the rest of this fallen world, either. Holy = You are set apart for God. You exist for God. And since God is holy, you are holy. You share his character, because he chose you, graced you, possessed you. You are holy. If you do not act in a holy way, you are not acting like what God has declared you to be. You are acting out of character. You contradict your essence as a Christian. For your identity is holiness to the Lord: you are holy.

And finally,

5. You are God's ROYAL PRIESTHOOD.

What is one of the benefits of this thread of identity? How does this title speak to your "job description"? Is there a "neutral zone" for a Christian?

Verse 9: "You are a . . . royal priesthood."

You are chosen by God and pitied by God and possessed by God and holy like God and royal priests to God. The point here is first that you have immediate access to God—you don't need another human priest as a mediator. God himself provided the one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. You have direct access to God, through God. And, second, you have an exalted, active role in God's presence. You are not chosen, pitied, possessed, and holy just to fritter away your time doing nothing. You are called now to minister in the presence of God. All your life is priestly service. You are never out of God's presence. You are never in a neutral zone. You are always in the court of the temple. And your life is either a spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1–2), or it is out of character.

So you can see that your identity—the question, "Who are you?"—leads directly to the question, "What are you here for?" Your identity leads to your destiny. You are chosen, pitied, possessed, and holy—all for a purpose—to minister as priests. And the heart of that ministry Peter describes for us very clearly.

How Did You Get This Identity?

But before we answer the question what we are here for, let's pause just a moment and answer the middle question: How did I get this identity?

The answer is almost too obvious. We got our identity from God. In fact our identity is our relation to God. We are chosen by GOD. We are pitied by GOD. We are possessed by GOD. We are set apart as holy by GOD. We are invested as royal priests by GOD.

Peter says this in a summary statement at the end of verse 9. He refers to God like this: "Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The light we live in his the light of our being chosen and pitied and possessed and holy and

priestly. And the way we got there is that God called us. He called us out of darkness into this marvelous light.

So the answer to the question: How did we get this identity is that God gave it to us. He gave it to us by virtue of his irresistible call. (I know that we were chosen by God before we were called by God. So it might look like I'm not saying it quite right. But what I mean is that the experience of walking in the light of being chosen—the experience of that identity—is the effect of God's sovereign call.)

God gave us the identity we have.

What Are You Here For?

What we saw was that our identity led directly to our destiny: we are chosen, pitied, possessed, and holy all for the sake of being a royal priesthood. But Peter is more specific when he tells us the precise reason for our existence. He says in verse 9:b that we exist for this reason: "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." This is the full-time destiny of a royal priest—to make the glories of the king known.

Our Identity and Its Purpose

There is a lot of discussion in our day of self-concept or self-identity. How do we view ourselves? It is an important question. And what I hope you hear this morning is that the specifically biblical angle on this question is that Christian selfhood is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It's defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship he creates with us and the destiny he appoints for us. In other words as a Christian you cannot talk about your identity without talking about the action of God on you, the relationship of God with you, and the purpose of God for you. The biblical understanding of human self-identity is radically God-centered.

Who am I? Who are you? You are a God-chosen one, a God-pitied one, a God-possessed one, a God-sanctified one. The very language of our identity in this text necessitates that God be included as the one who acts. Our identity is not an end in itself, but for the sake of priestly service, which Peter defines as proclaiming the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God made us who we are so that we might proclaim the excellency of his freedom in choosing us. The excellency of his grace in pitying us. The excellencies of his authority and power in possessing us. The excellencies of his worth and purity in making us holy.

In other words he has given us our identity in order that his identity might be proclaimed through us. God made us who we are so we could make known who he is. Our identity is for the sake of making known his identity. The meaning of our identity is that the excellency of God be seen in us.

Therefore being a Christian and making the greatness of God known are almost identical. We can do it in church services with preaching and singing and praying and reading. We can do it in our small groups as we tell each other what God has been for us, or what we need him to be for us. We can do it at work as we tell people what we love about God and why we think he is great. And we can do it in a thousand different ways of love that suit our situation and personality.

[The Story of Doug Nichols]

For example, I'll close with this wonderful story of how Doug Nichols, the International Director of Action International Ministries, made the excellencies of God known in a tuberculosis sanitarium in India in 1967—he was a missionary with Operation Mobilization and got TB. He was in the sanitarium for several months. He tried to give tracts and copies of the gospel of John away, but no one would take them. They didn't like him and assumed he was a rich American.

At one point for several nights he would wake up coughing at 2 AM. He noticed a little old emaciated man trying to get out of bed. The man couldn't stand up, and began to whimper. He lay back into bed. In the morning the stench in the ward was terrible and everyone was angry at the old man for not containing himself. The nurse who cleaned up even smacked the old man for making such a mess.

The next night the very same thing happened. Doug woke up coughing with his own terrible sickness and weakness. He saw the old man try again to get out of bed. Again he couldn't stand, and began to cry softly. Doug got out of bed went over to the old man. The man cowered with fear. But Doug picked him up with both arms and carried him to the bathroom which was just a hole in the floor, and then brought him back. The man kissed him on the cheek as he put him down in bed.

At 4 AM another patient woke Doug with a steaming cup of tea and made motions that said he wanted a copy of the booklet—the gospel of John. Through that whole day people kept coming to him and asking for his booklets even though he could not speak their language.

In other words one way to declare the excellencies of God is to act them out. When we act out the excellencies of God, people will hear them with even greater eagerness. Which is just another way of saying that our identity—who we are—is for the sake of God. God made us who we are to show the world who he is.