

“Who We Are, Where We Come From and What We Do” //

1 Peter 2:8–12// 4 – *I Am an Alien*

Introduction:

1 Peter 2:9. The question we’re going to address today is “what role the church should have in the world.” I recently read a pre-release copy of a book that my BFF Tim Keller is publishing next year, and in the book he gives 4 attitudes Christians have toward culture and politics.

BTW, heard the coolest story... (girl going to hospital: *phrase 1 of gospel prayer*)

- **Pietistic stance** – this group has an indifference toward the world, things like politics and injustice; they’re like: “we’re going to be raptured; and it’s all going to burn up in the end, so our main focus should be to convert as many as we can.” I mean, how worried should you be about the arrangement of the deck chairs on the Titanic if you know it’s sinking?
- **Conservative activists** – they believe the problem with our culture is that our culture has lost its moral absolutes; we need to recover Christian worldview and make our society more Christian. We need to get prayer back in schools and God back in government. Jerry Falwell and Glenn Beck need more TV programs.
- **Evangelical relevants** – they say “No, no... the problem is that the church is too removed from culture, and when we do speak we’re always hostile to it: we’re always talking about how wicked Hollywood is and how depraved the music is; what we should be doing instead is speaking up for the poor and marginalized and trying to get guys like Bono to write more songs.” Rob Bell for president.
- **Counter-culturalist** – we really shouldn’t be concerned with making the world like the church, or trying to reform the world. We need to meet the marginalized where they are and shape a new Christian society. God’s arena is the church, not the world.¹

Which one is right? Careful. Each has some truth in it; but each one is incomplete. I’m not going to fully answer this question today, but this passage gives you the central framework to begin thinking about it.

1 Peter 2: Peter discusses the identity the people of God are to have in the world. Several word pictures.

Let’s backtrack a little bit to vs. 4 to get the first one:

[4] As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,

...a spiritual house²:

- *We are living stones. Just like Jesus was a life-giving force, we will be.* He’s talking about something we’ll get to more later, but it’s the idea of spiritual gifts.
- God puts some gift in you and actually uses you as His instrument to bring life.

¹ From Tim Keller, “Church and Culture;” chapter in forthcoming book to be released in 2012.

² Underline these in the text.

to be a holy priesthood.

- All these phrases, by the way, go back to Israel. The church is the new Israel.³ Just about everything you see Israel doing in the OT, we do now in a spiritual way.
- Priests do 3 things:

(A) to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (vs. 5)

- A priest's first responsibility is to worship and love God.
- I've explained before that there's a lot of things we get wrong about Moss and the Exodus. God said, "Let my people go *that they might worship me.*"
- We exist first for God.
- Spiritual sacrifices: There are many motives for working for God. The greatest is just love for Him. Woman who poured it all out at Jesus feet. Jesus didn't need it. It was pure love.
 - Ever love someone so much you *have to* show it?
- I went through and listed all the things the NT says are our sacrifices:
 - Our bodies (Rom 12:1-2)⁴
 - The praise of our lips (Heb 13:15)
 - We give God what He's *worthy* of.
 - The sharing of our money (Heb 13:16; Phil 4:18) "I am well supplied, having received... the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."
 - Even The people we win to Jesus! (Romans 15:16)," Paul says my desire as a "priest of the gospel" is that "the offering of the Gentiles may be pleasing to God."
 - May the Lamb that was slain:
 - Compassion for the lost is a strong motive; but just love for Jesus is the greater motive
 - Again, you ever love someone so much you *have to* show it? Ever feel that way about Jesus?

(B) Priests represented God to people

- They spoke for God. They communicated God's word and feelings to others.
- We reflect God's attitude toward others. I think about how Jesus was; who He hung out with. How he spoke.
- Jesus always told the truth, but no one, no matter how broken, how dirty, how stained; was turned away or despised.

(C) Priests represented people to God

- Priests not only represented God to people; they represented people before God. They'd go before God and God would hear their prayer.
 - OT priests: wore an ephod with 12 stones, with the people of Israel on their heart. Hebrews says that Jesus as our high priest, now has us on His heart.
 - You and I are put in that position, we take others on our heart before God.
 - In the gospels, Jesus' power was released according to faith. **Intercessory faith:** We are here to believe on behalf of others.

³ Exodus 19:5-6, God said to Israel, "You shall be my treasured possession... a kingdom of priests."

⁴ One slide, but come up one at a time.

Down in vs. 9 he's going to use the idea of priesthood again except he's going to call us **...a royal priesthood (vs. 9)**

- royal: king;
- priesthood: one who stands in the gap with God.
- Here's the thing: In the OT, kings were never allowed to be priests.
 - One king tried it: Uzziah: 2 Chr 26:16–21
- Jesus was the first one who was a King and a Priest. He was both majestic and accessible.
- Now He's given that to us. We have the stature of a king but the privilege of a priest.
 - That doesn't mean you walk around ordering everyone around and making them serve you, because you're a king like Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve.
 - But it should change your mind about your position.
 - You're a king and queen. Paul uses that with a group who is acting like 3 year olds; they can't get along, they're acting like children, and he's like, "What are you doing? You're acting like children. You're kings and queens and one day you will rule and you're going to judge angels?" Some of you are like, "Oh, I'm nothing. I'm a worm." And you call that spirituality. Yes, you are a worm before God. But He's also made you a king and a queen. So start carrying yourself that way.
 - My life: felt unimportant; life wasn't going anywhere; people pushing me around; not taking care of myself... you're a king.

You're a royal priesthood

- (BTW: Some religious traditions have priests; you go and confess your sins to them. Here's why we don't. 2 reasons.
 - I don't need a human being to bestow on me what Jesus has already given to me. I go to a priest and the say, "Your sins are forgiven." And I say, "Uhhhh... Why would I need you to tell me that? I believed Jesus when He told me, whoever believes in me will receive forgiveness of sin." Imagine someone coming up to me and saying, 'I now pronounce your last name to be Greear.'" I'd say, "My dad gave me that name 38 years ago, but thanks."
 - Second reason we don't have priests is that you're all priests! We're all privileged.)

[9]...You are a chosen race.

- Every race has certain characteristics, right? We tend to take pride in those things.
- I started to make a list of various races, cultures and what they were "known" for, and I figured out that could get politically correct really quickly. So, let me just do it in parts of our country.
 - **Northerners**... believe they are efficient and smart (whatever you're distinctive; everyone else is bad at...); ergo, Northerners see the rest of the world as dumb and slow
 - **Southerners**... see themselves as more moral, more hospitable; stronger families.
 - **People out West**... see themselves as progressive, cultural elitist. They look at the rest of us as backwoods and bucktoothed.
 - I was in **Dallas** recently: every time I mention I'm going out there, I get 19 text messages from people in our church from Dallas who want to tell me somewhere to eat because the food out there is so much better than here... that's a distinctive for them. So they love to tell you how better their food is and how they are generally awesome at *everything*. So I would add annoying to their distinctives.
- This race has distinctions. How you live; what you do with your money; how you respond to people who wrong you; the joy you have in pain. (he's going to explain that in the chapters to come)
- But here's the irony: whereas the distinctives of other races lead to pride and division, the distinctives of the gospel do not.

- Whatever you think makes you distinctive, you take pride in, and tend to look down on people who don't have it as much as you.
- Do something with me: expand the idea of race in your mind beyond just black; white; Hispanic; Asian. Think about it more in terms of what sets you and your group apart.
 - Rich. What sets them apart is their money. Or their successfulness. They tend to look down on the poor.
 - The educated exclude the ignorant.
 - Democrats and Republicans: absolute disdain for those who don't share their values.
 - You say, "Not me, I'm tolerant. I accept everybody" You ever notice how intolerant tolerant people are of the people they see as intolerant? How superior they feel to intolerant people? I read in the newspaper a comment by a school official who said, "The one thing we absolutely will not tolerate here is intolerance." I thought... praytell... *What do you call the act of not tolerating intolerance?* We all have values, and tend to look down on those who don't.
- The distinctives the gospel produces lead not to pride, but to humility.
 - **Deut 7:6-7** *"The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples... and [9:6] Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people."*
 - I would never say this to my wife. "Not because you're beautiful—because you're not;" "not because you're smart."
 - I think now I've developed a love for her that goes beyond those things. But that's not how it started.
 - This is how I love my kids. Not because they are smart or pretty.
- God set His love on us when we were ugly and deformed. That leads us not to pride or boasting in ourselves, but (9) *"(we) proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (not our excellencies, but His!)
- [10] *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
 - That's a quote from Hosea. "Go take a prostitute as your wife." Then she goes back to prostitution and Hosea must take her back. That's you. Yet God chose you.
 - When I do a wedding, and you see the girl there in all of her beauty. Me: soiled; ugly; deformed, and God said, "That one... that one is mine."⁵
 - (We didn't even choose God; He chose us! Our hearts are so evil we would never have loved God unless He wooed us and drew us to Himself.⁶)
- That leads not to division and pride; it destroys division and pride.
 - I wasn't chosen because I was more moral; or more intelligent; or part of the upper class; God set His grace on me.
 - I'm not a natural saint; I'm a spiritual prostitute who has been made a saint by the gift righteousness of Christ.
- And so, the Gospel produced the most radically diverse and inclusive community the world had ever known.

⁵ Gaither song, "I'm so glad you're a part of the family of God." I think, "I'm surprised you're a part of the family of God."

⁶ *Tis not that I did choose thee, for Lord, that could not be, this heart would still refuse thee, has thou not chosen me? If I love thee, thou must have loved me first.* ~Josiah Conder (1836)

- You saw this in Peter’s church. The Greeks and Romans would not mix rich and poor. The Christians did. The Romans and the Jews would not mix races. Christians did, because they said we were all poor when Jesus emptied Himself to save us; and we were all part of one race, the condemned, sinful human race, when Jesus the righteous came and died in our place.
- Rodney Stark said that one of the distinctive things of early Christianity was the sheer diversity of the churches... one place where slave and free; rich and poor, young and old; Jew and Greek. Rulers and servants all came together.
- So, people say, “Christianity is exclusive.” Yes. But it is the most inclusive exclusivity there has ever been.

...a holy nation

- The Jews were to be like a city set on hill, putting on display the beauty of God. Their laws; justice; purity; how they took care of the poor; these things radiated God.
- Peter now applies that to the church. We’re like a new nation, within nations. Why no American flag.
 - I’m patriotic. But not in here. This is about a unity around Jesus and in nothing else.
- When people come in here they should enter a new nation. Think of it like an embassy. An embassy represents one country to another. The embassy should be good representation of country (not dirty). The church is the embassy of heaven.
- So Peter says *[12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God...*
 - The word “conduct” is used 13x in NT; 8x in Peter! Peter is concerned with our “conduct” before Gentiles. He’s going to get into that in the next few chapters...
- For now, he summarizes it in one word. HOLY. Remember? Be holy like God is holy. 2 ideas:
 - Holiness means **separation** from the impure
 - But it also means **perfection**—of love
 - Jesus was holy, but He was the friend of sinners who touched the lepers and entered into their pain
 - Christians talk about holiness like it is remaining separate from the problems of the world; like you get sanitized and tried to avoid contact.
 - But holiness means living like Jesus, which means entering into the pain of the world. Being close enough to the pain of the world that you enter into it.
 - Our separation is not isolation; it is contact without contamination of sinfulness.
 - C. T. Studd: Some people want to live in the sound of chapel bells; I want to run a mission a yard from the gates of hell.
 - **Ex: The letter to Diognetus** – “Christians busy themselves on earth but their citizenship is in heaven.” *They marry and have children, but they don’t kill unwanted babies. They are persecuted by all, yet they’re loved by everyone. They share their table with everybody but they don’t share their bed with everybody. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things.*”
- A holy nation! A nation within nations. Jesus talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount, and He used two great images: salt and light. Very different.
 - Salt is best scattered—you don’t gather a bowl of salt and eat it... I love salt; I eat it too much, but I don’t do that. Salt is best scattered; put into food it adds flavor. The people of God are like that. We preserve. We add beauty. We are not to be contained in the church; we are in the world helping promote justice and equality and mercy.
 - Light, on the other hand, is best gathered—our life together was to be a demonstration.

- In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (where He taught this) He did both; Matthew 4:23 (healed all kinds of people); then went up on the mountain and taught the beauties of integrity and justice and sacrificial love and said Matthew 5:16 that we are like a city on a hill;
- Remember those 4 categories I gave you at the beginning? This shows you the answer. We are both salt (sprinkled into the world for preservation and to add flavor, or beauty) and
- IMO, the church does better at the gathering than the scattering.

... a people for His own possession

- My favorite part. We are coveted by Him.
- Let's go back to that quote by Hosea: we are like the unfaithful, prostitute wife. That's what we are.
 - Some of you have low self-esteem. My message is not that you have higher self-esteem. Maybe your self esteem is not low enough. But the gospel is that you are simultaneously more wicked than you ever imagined; and more loved and accepted than you ever dreamed.
- You are loved and cherished by *God*.
- That will become your strength in trial and temptation and persecution.
 - Julia Roberts' story
 - Your identity is what the most important person in your life thinks about you. The holy God cherishes you.

Church! This is what you are to be. A spiritual, life-giving house. A holy, royal priesthood. A new, chosen race. A holy nation. God's chosen people.

This all comes, Peter says, **from having Jesus as your cornerstone**. That's woven all through this passage (vs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

Like I told you last week, the cornerstone frames the building. It sets the lines. It holds the structure.

- Last week I explained that everybody has a cornerstone. Your cornerstone is your core; it's what you fall back on when things go wrong. It makes life good; it gives you purpose and meaning and permanence.
- Anything you make your cornerstone besides Jesus will lead to a faulty, unstable building. It will evaporate and crumble and produce death in you, not life.
 - Beauty... if beauty is your cornerstone, then you obsess about it. When you're in college and you're insecure about how pretty you are, you are eaten up with jealousy for those prettier than you and obsessed about what you look like; which leads you to obsess about your body which causes things like bohemia); or when you get older and your beauty starts to fade you try to hang on to it (work out insanely and start doing weird things to your face); I read a book recently written by Roger Scruton, a psychologist who is not a Christian, who said that what drives men in their 40's and 50's to adultery is they feel this loss of beauty and they want to possess it so they go after a younger girl because they want to be united to beauty again; so they break their marriage vows and destroy their children's hearts and throw away their families, because they are driven by the need for beauty.⁷
 - If your cornerstone is "being important," that leads you to jealousy and constant comparison and over-competitiveness and hatred. That's because your identity is built on being the best, because being the best makes you important.

⁷ Roger Scruton, *Beauty*, 43.

- These things make terrible cornerstone. Make Jesus your cornerstone. You're important because you are a treasured child of the holy God; Christ has bought you with His precious blood and has a purpose for you in His eternal plan. You're beautiful because Christ, who is eternal beauty, has clothed you with Himself. That will never fade. Even when the outward man perishes, Paul says, the inward man keeps getting more beautiful.
 - Some of you older ladies... yes, you don't look like you did when you are 22.
- ***Anything besides Jesus will crumble. I heard a tragic example of this:***
 - I watched with the late Steve Jobs on *60 Minutes*; fascinating interview on multiple levels, but I was most intrigued by the end of it, where he talked about believing in God. He said that throughout his life, he's believed on and off in God. He said he gives God a 50/50 shot of existing. But then he said that as he approached death, he's starting to believe more in God, primarily because he really wants there to be a God. "Because if there is no God, there is no afterlife. You die, and that's it. And nothing you did matters, because at that point you're dead. That's all that matters. So, I want there to be a God, because I want life to go on... but sometimes I think the human body just has an on-off switch and when it's switched off, it's off. Which, incidentally, on-off switches have never been a part of Apple products... I don't like the idea of things being shut off forever."
 - *Nothing, not even being one of our generation's most successful businessmen, is a lasting cornerstone.*
- You've got a chance to be a king in a new nation; a priest who connects people to God; part of a spiritual, life-giving house that is building something that will last forever.

Prayer time/campus pastors

- Shown mercy/coveted by God
- Now you are a priest (we approach God like royal priests, not peasants)

Bullpen:

CMO announcement:

- Every year at Christmas one of the things we focus on is generosity; responding to God just with gratefulness. A couple of ways we do that. One is many people just give to help us reach our community. God is doing a lot through this church. This past year we have baptized over 700 people; we've started several new ministries—to prisoners, to the poor, to unwed mothers, to high school students and college students; there's a lot we need to do... we've got to build facilities; we've got to plan new outreach events like ballpark services.
- The other thing we do is, as a church, give a lot of money away to plant churches and bless the poor around the world. Our goal is to give away \$625,000 toward that this year.
- So, two ways: give generally to the church for what God is doing here; the other is to give to a special offering that we give away.

- Honestly, I want you to give generously to both this Christmas. We have a responsibility to both: to invest in what God is doing here to reach this community; our neighbors; the poor among us; and we have a responsibility to give away our stuff to what God is doing in the world.

The irony of holiness, which means separation, was that Jesus showed His holiness not by separating Himself from our pain but entering into it; that's because His holiness was not just moral purity but also fullness of love.

People from Yadkinville where I'm from are known around the world for being spooky smart and unfathomably good looking (at least, that's the way I remember it).

- The greatest argument against marriages, government and Christians are marriages, government, and Christians.
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- Our confidence is scandalous

Kharis: Adam and Eats: I would give discount to my family. Pause. Not my family in Jesus, dad, because that would be way too big. So, full price for the church.

Church as God's Kingdom people living in God's place (see Scot McKnight's explanation in chapter "Jesus and the Gospel" of "what the kingdom is")

Not racism: chosen race

Priesthood

Royal: our identity in Him!

Priests and priestesses: egalitarian; no hierarchy in church

Holy nation

Embassy should be good representation of country.

"Conduct" 13x in Bible; 8x in Peter! Peter is concerned with our "conduct" before Gentiles

We are a heavenly people, and should stand in stark contrast to the world we live in.

Kharis: Adam and Eats: I would give discount to my family. Pause. Not my family in Jesus, dad, because that would be way too big. So, full price for the church.

The greatest argument against marriages, government and Christians are marriages, government, and Christians.

Question: what is our role toward politics?: Keller's categories from "church and culture" articles

Ex: The letter to Diognetus – "Christians busy themselves on earth but their citizenship is in heaven." This is what Peter is saying. He goes on: "*They marry and have children, but they don't kill unwanted babies. They are persecuted by all, yet they're loved by everyone. They share their table with everybody but they don't share their bed with everybody. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things.*"

- Living stones means that like Jesus, your life has an eternal, permanent, life-giving quality about it.

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Where I work out: *Judgment free zone*. We should be that.