

INTRODUCTION TO CHURCH COVENANT

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“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” - Peter 2:9, 10

Did you realize that the above is a description of you? Yes, it is true. As a new believer in Jesus Christ, as an undeserving recipient of His wondrous grace, you have been created in Christ to be everything pictured in this passage. Look more closely at Peter’s description. “A Chosen Generation” – Out of all the human race, God personally chose you to be a recipient of His love. As you well know from your own experience thus far in life, God’s choice of you was not because of your personal worth, but it was in spite of you. It was in spite of your rebellion, in spite of your failure to be thankful, in spite of your selfishness, and in spite of your refusal to glorify God with all of your being. But God, the all-sufficient Provider, willingly and freely appointed His only begotten Son to be your sin-bearer before you were even born. He decreed that you would be “holy and without blame before Him in love.” Yes, you are a “chosen generation,” a part of His chosen family. You are properly and fully a chosen, adopted son or daughter of God.

A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

God chose you not just to enjoy all the privileges of being a member of His family, which would be enough to elicit an eternity of thanksgiving. He now designates you as part of His kingdom of priests. In Jesus Christ, you are a king and priest to God. Your royal clothing is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. In Christ, you now have power over sin. Sin does not reign over you anymore. You are also given the inestimable right as a priest to bring directly to God through Jesus Christ offerings of praise and petitions for needs. You have been granted access into the throne of God. What riches are yours through Christ.

AN HOLY NATION

Holiness has been completely foreign to your experience in life to this point. You may have lived a very outwardly sinful life and even today bear the painful reminders of those sins against a perfectly holy God. Perhaps you have not lived in gross sin and have been confident and taken pride in your own righteousness. God through His arresting grace has mercifully revealed to you that your personal righteousness is completely insufficient to satisfy His just demands, and He has brought you to trust only in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, you are rightly described as holy. This holiness is perfect, complete, because it is not your own, it is Christ’s that has been credited to you. Even today, while still bearing the marks of sin and while still engaged in a life-long battle against the desires of the flesh, you are perfectly holy in Jesus Christ.

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

Sin always brings death. That is the clear and repeated message of the Bible. Death of relationships, death of reputation, natural death, spiritual death, death of all kinds is the ugly result of sin. Often accompanying these losses brought by sin is shame, sadness, and a sense of worthlessness. That is why this description of God is so startling. Did you know that you are God's special treasure, His special possession? You are a treasure to God. In spite of your rebellion, in Jesus Christ, you are His special possession. God, for His own purpose to demonstrate His glory, has chosen you to be the special recipient of His grace in Christ Jesus. Your shame has been replaced with the highest honor! We are told in verse 10 that before the love of Christ personally touched our hearts, we "were not a people." There is no value, no worth, no belonging outside of Jesus Christ, but in Christ we are His personally chosen, special treasure.

DEMONSTRATING HIS GLORY

Why did God bestow all of these titles, all of these blessings on you? The simple answer is because He wanted to. Isn't that amazing? God did not have to choose you, did not have to make you holy, was not obligated to give you access to Him. He delights in demonstrating His glory in His love and mercy. You have been personally selected to demonstrate the glory of God. What a high honor has been conferred upon you. He has selected you to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." This is your commission for the rest of your life. Your life to this point has been all about you, about your own glory. God in His mercy has shown you the worthlessness of that pursuit, and has called you to a much more meaningful and worthwhile existence.

The first way that God has demonstrated His glory through you has been by creating a new spirit within you, a spirit that has cried out to God in faith for mercy and has claimed Jesus Christ and His work as your only hope of salvation. He has shown you the wretched condition of your soul apart from Jesus Christ but has also made your soul to rest its weary head upon the finished work of Christ. Praise God! You have shown forth His praises by confessing the Lord Jesus Christ as your salvation.

The next step of praise is to follow the example and command of Christ to be baptized in His name. You have publicly claimed Jesus Christ, become identified with Him, and now bear His name and His banner for the rest of your life. In being baptized, you have also joined yourself to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, a band of people that Jesus himself created while He was on earth to show forth His praises until we reach heaven. The rest of your life is now dedicated to glorifying God in His Church (Ephesians 3:21). The life of a Christian should be centered around life in the church of God. The church is where God desires to see His glory proclaimed. You are not to wander through life alone, unconnected. God has graciously provided His church as a place of safety, accountability, and belonging for you until you reach heaven.

How does a church show forth the praise of God? How does the church glorify God? The apostle Paul answers this question in I Timothy 3:14,15 while giving young Timothy instructions regarding the qualifications of preachers and deacons. He tells Timothy, "These things write I unto thee...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Notice several important truths in these verses. Notice first the importance that God places on His church. It is the "house of God" and the "church of the living God." In other words, it is where God dwells and it belongs to Him. We must realize these two imperative truths

if we are to bring God the glory we desire. We strongly desire to be an active part of His church because that's where He is. On the other hand, we must be careful how we behave as a member of His church because it belongs to Him, it bears His name, and the idea of His name being besmirched as a result of our wrong behavior should cause great reverence towards His house.

THE CHURCH'S COMMISSION

Notice also the church's commission. The church is to be the "pillar and ground of the truth." The church exists to show forth, to proclaim, to support the truth of glory of God in Jesus Christ. What an incredible blessing. God has given us as members of His church the most blessed job in the world. We exist to proclaim, uphold, and defend the truth of God! We are not free to determine our own course. Our course is set. Love the truth, know the truth, buy the truth, and sell it not.

Finally, notice the provision that God has made to enable the church to carry out this mission. "These things write I unto thee..." God has preserved His Word so that there might not be any question as to how we can glorify God in the church. The Bible contains every single piece of information we need to glorify God. Through its instruction we learn how to show forth His praise. The truth of God is not hidden but is contained within these sacred pages. A sincere thirst for the Word of God is the beginning of the journey of a God-honoring life.

Why a church covenant? Generally, there are two official documents that a church holds to. One is called the Articles of Faith. The Articles of Faith is simply a list of the most vital truths that the church believes the Bible to teach. This is the truth that we are commissioned by God to proclaim, support, hold forth, love, and defend. The church covenant, on the other hand, details the behavior that is necessary to not only proclaim truth, but to walk in truth. Paul instructed to "know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." The Bible clearly teaches us how to live in the church to bring glory to God, and the church covenant is a compilation of those important precepts. Praising God is more than just saying good things about Him. True praise enlists both the mouth and the feet. Our actions are the production of our hearts. A heart that has been chosen as His special possession longs to bring glory to God. The church covenant is our solemn promise to walk in a way that is pleasing to God. As you read this book, keep ever before your mind the grace that God has worked in you in calling you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.