

A CHOSEN RACE

Peter writes in his first letter to the Christians who were scattered as exiles throughout all of what we call today the Middle East. In his letter, he attempts to help them, and us, deal with the question "Who are we?". Peter answer is simple. In 1 Peter 2:9, he says "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." To be God's people means we are like children of a loving parent. God's love is like that of a father in the front pew of a crowded church, holding his little boy with an illness that would throw him into seizures without warning. One Sunday morning the entire congregation was disturbed by a particularly violent attack. The father picked the boy up in his strong arms, carried him to the back of the crowded sanctuary where he rocked him, whispering words of love to help his boy through the problem. What most struck the congregation was that the father showed no trace of embarrassment, only love for his hurting son. God loves us that way. Our problems are often self-imposed moral lapses, but our suffering is as real as that of the boy. God cradles us through those times when we would distract the world around from hearing the message of God's love.

As God's people, we are also a holy nation. We are cut out from the world. In 1 Peter 2:11, Peter goes on to call the church "aliens and strangers." While God calls us to live IN this world, we don't BELONG TO this world. In the last century an American tourist paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a cot. The tourist asked "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" The rabbi replied "Where is your's?" The puzzled American asked "Mine? I'm only a visitor here I'm only passing through." To which the wise rabbi replied "So am I." A holy nation no longer belongs to this world. We belong to a new colony, a beachhead, an outpost. We have transferred citizenship and have a whole new loyalty. The values of this world are no longer controlling us.

What, then, does characterize the people of God, the church? What do we do with this new identity? As believers in Jesus, we are called to be active in the world, changing labels. In the world, labels divide, separate, and exclude. In the church we are called to be an open

society which, though it does not belong to this world, invites the people of this world to belong to us. Christians are label changers. As a holy people in this world, the church is called to change tags. We are called to invite those rejected by the powers of this world to join the new colony of God's people. As people who have received the gift of a new, powerful identity as those claimed by God, we are called to throw open the doors and invite others into God's new people. God wants us to be ONE nation, united in our love of Him and each other.

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