

KINGDOM IDENTITY

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Stumbling. Costly moments of inattention or preoccupation. To do it publicly feels so embarrassing. You try to catch yourself, pretending that you suddenly decided to take a very short jog and then settle back into a stroll. But you still feel awkward and goofy, even when no one else is around.

Sometimes, it is the mind that stumbles, not the feet. Similarly inattentive or preoccupied, we ignore God's leading or direction. The Apostle Peter says it this way: "They stumble, being disobedient to the word."

Stumbling is not intentional. Peter is not describing willful disobedience. Rather it is the result of a moment's distraction, or perhaps more than a moment of careless wandering in thought. Wandering from the word. Wandering from the leadership of Christ. Wandering from the story Jesus is writing of our lives. Losing our connection. Forgetting who we really are.

Then, Peter reminds us:

^{1 Peter 2:9} *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

By the Holy Spirit's illumination, Peter reveals six things about us, about our Kingdom Identity. These six things are true of you, if you have invited Jesus Christ to come into your life as your Forgiver and Leader. Six things that are true of you if you have been "born again." Six things that are true of you even when you forget, become distracted, or stumble.

1. You are a Chosen Generation.

"Generation" means a race of people. A race is distinguished by common ancestry, a common DNA. Physically, we are all of Adam's race, and trace our roots back to the same father and mother, Adam and Eve. Spiritually alive in Christ Jesus, we trace our common roots to the Savior and the blood He shed for us.

We are a new race of human beings, spiritually alive in Christ, and chosen by God for a purpose.

The Hebrew people were chosen by God for the purpose of bringing to the world His covenant and His Son, Jesus. So now, we have been chosen to reveal His Son through our life together. From every tribe and tongue, we have been joined together in one body — one new man — a new race, chosen by God in Christ, for His purpose.

Chosen by God's election, not by our own earning. It is a call of grace that has brought us here. It is for a purpose not our own. "Not my will but yours be done." We are a chosen race.

2. You are a Royal Priesthood.

Literally, this means a “kingdom of priests.” From this, German Reformer Martin Luther took the idea of the “priesthood of every believer.” God’s Kingdom is not a kingdom of cooks and bottlenwashers, nor a kingdom of financiers and politicians, but a Kingdom of Priests.

You are a priest before God. We are priests of the Most High. This minimizes the fenceline between clergy and laity. It really says that we are all clergy; only our degrees of service vary. There are in this church of Jesus Christ no spectators! We are all participants in the acts of worship and devotion to God. That is why we do not celebrate a “mass,” where priests worship while the people observe and partake only minimally from a distance. Everything this church is about is leading each one of you into a fuller role as a priest of God. Most will not make it their full-time vocation, but all should participate at an increasing level.

We are priests of a Kingdom — under a King’s domain. That suggests several important things. Clearly, one of them is that this is not a democracy of priests. We all have one Head, which is Jesus Christ. Our method is not to discuss what we would like to do for Him, but to pray until we have a shared sense of what He wants us to do. He is the King; we are His priests.

Priests represent God to the people, and the people to their God. Therefore, ours is a two-way service: re-presenting God to the world by our life’s word and witness and representing the world before God by our prayers and worship. How are you doing with this task? The King is expecting your report.

3. You are a Holy Nation.

The words in the original language are *ethnos hagian*. You may recognize the word *ethnos* as the root of “ethnic.” It is not a political or geographic nation which he speaks of but a people group, a spiritual culture.

How wondrous it is that people of different languages, and dress, and physical color and stature may all have a common spiritual culture. Everywhere in the world when people are born again, they signify it by being baptized in water, as Jesus commanded. This single badge of discipleship identifies Christians everywhere as belonging to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

We may wear different clothes, and sing different songs, and gather at different times and in different places, but we are One People — a Nation belonging to God.

Some people cringe at being called “holy,” fearing being labeled “hypocrite” because of their many stumblings. Many imagine it is an impossible calling to fulfill. Others, meanwhile, are busy finding fault with others whom they imagine are “unholy,” because of their behavior, and separating themselves from them.

The creators of the excellent movie, “End of the Spear,” have been chastened publicly for giving the lead roles of Nate Saint and his son, Steve, to an actor (Chad Allen) who is known for his homosexual activism. Self-righteous Christians have turned up their noses at this...

“Holy” means devoted, dedicated to God, set apart for His purpose. It does not mean stiff, stuffed shirt, holier-than-thou, pretending-to-have-it-all-together, looking-down-your-nose, isolationist, can’t-relate-to-ordinary-people, controlling, rigid, narrow-minded, bigot.

It means dedicated to God’s purpose. Are you? If not, why not? If not, to whose purpose are you dedicated? In the words of singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, “You’re gonna serve someone.” Everybody

does. Who do you serve? Whose interests do you watch out for? Whose opinions do you care about? Whose voice are you listening for? Whose needs are you trying to meet?

4. You are His Own Special People.

Peculiar in this specific sense: you are a people *acquired for a purpose*. You have been bought with a price — redeemed to God by the precious blood of His only Son, Jesus. You have been called — awakened — by the Holy Spirit's activity in your life. You have been enfolded by His Church into the life of God's Family. You are a people acquired. You are God's instruments.

Perhaps you have noticed this: instruments — whether musical or medical or power tools — do not operate themselves. They require an operator. Someone to flip the switch and apply the instruments to the project.

God's instruments do not operate themselves, either. You have been given spiritual gifts — you are a gifted instrument — but you cannot operate in spiritual gifts at will. Even Jesus could not, but He only did what He saw His Father doing.

While self-motivated spiritual operators are a problem at times, most of the time the problem in the church is the opposite: fearful, resistant spectators. What Peter calls disobedient stumblers.

Our purpose is to re-present Jesus, to “set forth the deeds and display the virtues” of the One who has called us to Himself.

He has brought us to Himself by His own strong arm. “Out of darkness, into His marvelous light.”

5. You are a People of God.

Have you ever felt like a nobody — unnoticed, insignificant? If so, you were not alone. I suspect everyone has dealt with such feelings at various times. And, in fact, it was true of us all in general sense.

We were not a people before. Just the mass of humanity. We had no connection to each other beyond our immediate family or tribe, much less to God. We bore no family likeness. We were not united.

But Jesus has changed all that. Now we are! The throngs have become a family. Our likeness is not physical, nor even cultural, but spiritual. “We have all been made to drink of one Spirit.” We are the People of God. We belong to Him. He is our Head, our Covering, our Leader. Moreover, He loves us!

6. You have Obtained Mercy.

How great is that! Our connection to God is based on mercy. Mercy, not performance. Mercy, not judgment.

Have you ever tried to capture water in your fist? You just can't. Peace was once like that for me. Elusive. But Jesus has changed that, too! He is our peace. He has removed the guiltiness that separated us from God. In mercy, He took our sins away.

Mercy is not receiving what you deserve. What we deserved has been laid upon Jesus. He took our place.

Mercy is not maybe. Mercy is certain. Mercy is mighty. Mercy wipes out every debt (except the debt of love). Mercy overcomes the past.

And you have obtained it. It is your possession, secured by an everlasting covenant in Jesus' blood. Once mercy was a vain hope. Now it is your own, given by God, and no one can pluck you out of His hand.

This, then, is how God sees us. This is how He thinks of us. This is how He relates to you every day.

You are a chosen race, a Kingdom of priests, a culture devoted to Him, acquired for His own purpose, that you may display the praiseworthy deeds and virtues of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You are now the people of God, and have obtained His mercy.

How do you now see yourself? How will you now think of yourself? God's way, or the old way? You can align yourself with Him, or stumble back into the old rut. The choice is yours. Every day.