

A Peculiar People

With our previous lessons, we have been focused on what a Christian looks like in a general way. We will continue with that idea, but begin to narrow our view with this study. As we progress, we want to become more and more specific with our applications.

We want to begin this study by considering Peter's instructions from his first epistle:

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 marvellous light... (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

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... (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV).

We have been looking at the idea that God expects us to be holy, He expects for us to act in a righteous manner. If we choose to follow that path, then we are going to be different from those around us. In fact, we will stick out, sometimes drastically, from people of the world. Simply living in holiness sets one apart from the world!

It is interesting that the translators of the King James Version chose the word *peculiar* in this passage. According to *Merriam Webster's Dictionary*, this word means:

1: characteristic of only one person, group, or thing : DISTINCTIVE

2: different from the usual or normal:

a: SPECIAL, PARTICULAR

b: ODD, CURIOUS

c: ECCENTRIC, UNUSUAL

If one is peculiar, he will stand out from all that are around him. By looking at the translation of this phrase in various versions, we can get the a more full idea of what Peter was communicating to us. God has chosen us (those who will obey Him) to be a peculiar people, or His own special people. We have been set apart to be something different than all the world around us.

Paul expressed a similar idea:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11–14).

The phrase underlined above is very similar to that found in Peter's epistle. In the King James Version, this is also translated as "peculiar people." Lowe-Nida defines the word used by Paul as:

58.48 περιούσιος, ον: pertaining to that which is peculiar or special about some entity—'peculiar,

special.’ καὶ καθάρῃ ἑαυτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον ‘and purify for himself a special people’ Tt 2:14¹

What we should gather from these passages is that God has an expectation that we are going to be different from the world around us. God is doing the work that He has promised for us. Paul told Titus that Christ was redeeming us, and purifying us, that we might be “His own special people” or “a peculiar people.” We become His own special possession, something that is peculiar to Him, and unlike anything else that is common in the world.

Strange to the world...

When we become His own special people, a peculiar people, it will be evident to those who are around us. Peter said that the way we behave will seem strange to those who are around us:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:1–5).

Much like our study in Romans 6, Peter shows that once one becomes a Christian, they will no longer live in the sinful practices that they participated in before. They will so utterly change that the people that they had been with before will think it strange that they no longer behave in that manner. This person will change so much that they will not fit in, in any way, with the sinful crowd that they had associated with in their “past lifetime.”

Notice that Peter identifies the sinful practices as the “will of the Gentiles.” Here, *Gentiles* means those that are outside of God, not those who are physically not Jews. They are not a part of spiritual Israel, but rather of the spiritual Gentiles (Romans 2:29). This idea stands in direct contrast to the will of God. One who has become the special possession of God is only concerned about the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17).

This transformation that takes place when one becomes the disciple of Christ should be evident to all. Those who were participants in sin with us should see that we are no longer involved in those sinful things. They will think it strange that we no longer participate with them. This indicates that they will have a hard time comprehending this great change. They will know that we are not the person we used to be, and that we do not participate in the sinful activity that once defined us. Instead of being overcome with the “flood of dissipation” that was once a way of life, we will instead live a restrained, godly and holy life of righteousness!

Be different...

As we move forward in our study, we will get more direct in our applications. We will be examining very specific attitudes and practices that define for us what a Christian is supposed to look like. However, with the rest of this lesson we want to set an overview of some things that should help us to recognize God’s expectations for us. What looks different about a Christian? Remember, Paul told the Corinthians:

Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

¹ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 590. Print.

So, if we are not supposed to separate ourselves from the world physically (John 17:15, 1 Corinthians 5:10), how do we become different? In general, there are several areas we can briefly consider to illustrate how the Christian is to be different. As we look at these, we can certainly see how those of the world (and especially those with whom we associated in the world before becoming Christians) would think us strange!

Christians no longer think like people of the world... The mind of the Christian is nothing like the mind of the worldly person. The Christian trains his mind to focus on the will of the Lord, and not his own will. This requires an attitude of submissiveness that is not natural! Left to our own devices, we focus on only that which is best for us. We are concerned about our own well being above anything else. This is something that takes effort on our part to implement. We must train our minds to seek out that which is right, to think in the way that God wants for us to think (reflective of the way that He thinks).

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Learning to discern between good and evil is a skill developed by the training of the mind, teaching it to think in the proper way. Paul described the contrast of how one thinks when they do not have the will of God as their anchor point in this way:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting... (Romans 1:28)

Without God directing the way that we think, we will have a “debased mind” which leads us into all types of unrighteousness. In fact, in Romans 1, Paul listed many sins that were the result of being given over to this debased mind. We will, in future lessons, take a look at those specific practices in greater detail.

Submitting to God means that we put His will for us first in our lives. We are truly willing to seek Him and His righteousness first in our lives.

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:27–33).

Jesus’ instructions rely upon us training our minds to think in the way that He expects. It means that we are going to make significant changes in our minds. Our natural inclination is to worry about ourselves, to worry about our wellbeing. But, when we trust in God, we train our minds to focus on Him and His kingdom. We stop thinking so much about us, and our own desires, and we think about God and what He wants from us.

When we submit to God, which in itself is a mindset that is not normal for us, we begin to think in a way that puts other people first.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one

another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another... (Romans 12:9–10)

So, not only do we put God first, we begin to put others ahead of ourselves. Their wellbeing becomes even more important to us than our own. When we begin to think in this way, it will become evident in our practices. Those of the world, who cannot understand this way of thinking, will most certainly think that we are strange when they see us acting in a way that puts others ahead of ourselves! It is, however, this type of thinking that makes us special to God. We are not like everyone else, but rather, we are His “own special people.”

Christians no longer act like people of the world... How we think will change the way that we act. Jesus said:

So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man” (Matthew 15:16–20).

He also taught:

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

These teachings make it clear that actions are a direct result of what is in the heart, or the mind. The way we think causes us to act in a particular way. When our mind is trained on the will of God, then our actions will reflect that. We no longer give ourselves over to the wickedness that we were enslaved to before our obedience.

When we change the way we behave ourselves, people begin to take notice. They recognize that we are different than everyone else around us. In future lessons we will examine some of these ideas in greater detail, but we want to introduce some things that obviously set the Christian apart from the world in their actions. We are only going to consider a few examples to help us prepare for a more detailed study in future lessons.

Use of the tongue. Christians do not talk like people of the world. Things like profanity, lying, gossip and backbiting should not be a part of the life of a Christian. Christians certainly appear to be strange when they refrain from participating in the types of foul language and course jokes that most in the world spew. While James tells us that controlling the tongue is a most difficult task, the Christian will work diligently to use his tongue to glorify God, rather than add to the corruption of the world (James 3:8-12)!

Modest attire. Perhaps one of the most distinctive characteristics of the faithful Christian, which is most noticeable to those around us, is that of modest dress. People of the world think it strange that the Christian continues to dress modestly when they think immodesty is a necessity. “It is too hot!” “That clothing is not fashionable!” “Everyone else is wearing a bathing suit!” These types of things are heard frequently in regards to fashion. Modest apparel will make one stand out from the world! Paul made it clear (1 Timothy 2:9-10) that this would be the case. However, those who “profess godliness” will do so through the apparel they choose. And, the opposite is true as well. Those who reject godliness will show it through the apparel they choose to wear!

Service to others. One way that we show our manner of thinking has changed is to put others first in our actions. We saw how we are to think in terms of putting others first, but if we do not actually put that into action, it is futile. In fact, if we don’t put it into action, it is evident that our thinking

has not really changed at all! Perhaps the greatest example of this principle is found in John chapter 13. There, Jesus showed the true meaning of putting others first. He humbly submitted Himself to His brethren, and performed the most menial of tasks for them: washing their feet. Through this selfless act, Jesus showed what it means to truly serve others. Until we are willing to serve like He served, we have a lot of growing to do!

Humility. We live in a time when it is almost unthought-of to show humility. Our culture teaches us to be puffed up in ourselves. We see humility as a weakness, not a strength. However, when we are truly the people of God, we will adopt His way of thinking, and therefore His way of acting. He wants us to be different than the world around us!

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10).

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time... (1 Peter 5:5-6).

In a world that emphasizes bragging upon oneself, a person who shows humility will stand out as being far different than the people around him.

We will go into greater detail on these topics in future lessons, as well as address many more activities that show how Christians act differently than the people of the world. There should be a great amount of evidence to show that a person is a follower of God. If those around a person cannot tell that they are a Christian, then he is not acting as God would require!

Christians feel an urgency to share the message of hope... For one who is truly converted to Christ, the message of the gospel is of great value. It is recognized as the tool that the Lord has used to bring sinners to Himself:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Having received this message of salvation, Christians see the urgency in proclaiming it so that others can have the same hope of eternal life. How can we keep it to ourselves when we understand the implications? There is only one gospel message (Galatians 1:6-9), and without it the people around us will be eternally condemned (Romans 10:14-15).

Christians, when they understand what is at stake, should be compelled to proclaim the gospel to those who are lost. They should have the very same type of attitude that was expressed by Jeremiah:

Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not (Jeremiah 20:9).

If we love people, and their eternal souls, how can we fail to teach the gospel? How can we ignore the flood of traffic on the wide road, when we know that we have the message that can bring them safely onto the narrow (Matthew 7:13-14)? We should have the same desire that God has, not wanting any to be lost, but trying to help as many as possible find their way into eternal salvation:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Love for others, and concern for their eternal souls will cause those who are Christians to dedicate

themselves to sharing the gospel message. It will never be good enough that we are on our way to Heaven; we will want to take as many with us as we possibly can! How can we not proclaim the gospel?

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16–18).

If we are proclaiming the gospel, we will stand out from the world around us. In fact, they will often think we are quite strange because we are so intent on spreading this message! If people never see us talking about the Bible, and its glorious gospel message (1 Timothy 1:11), then we cannot possibly be the kind of people that God wants serving Him!

As we continue our study, we will see just how different God expects us to be. Our behavior will be evident to all whom we come into contact with (1 Timothy 4:15). God certainly has great expectations for His people. He expects that we will be a “peculiar people,” a people that is set apart for service to Him in every regard. Let us strive to be “His own special people” diligently set to do His will.

Questions...

1. What does it mean to be peculiar? Why does God want His people to be peculiar?
2. How will the world view those who are truly faithful to the Lord? If we are not viewed this way, what do you think it says about our faithfulness?
3. Does God expect Christians to separate themselves completely from worldly people? Why or why not?
4. How should a Christian think differently than the world around him?
5. List at least 3 ways that the Christian should act differently than the world.
6. How important should spreading the gospel be to the Christian? What should he allow to interfere with this task?
7. List at least 4 topics you would like to discuss more specifically concerning how a Christian should or should not act.

