

## YOUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

*2* <sup>4</sup>Coming to him, the living stone—rejected by men, but chosen and honored by God—  
<sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,  
who offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.  
<sup>6</sup>[This] is contained in Scripture: “Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored  
cornerstone; and the one who believes in him shall never be disappointed.” <sup>7</sup>Now the  
honor is for you who believe; but for the unbelievers, “The stone that the builders  
rejected, this [very one] has become the chief cornerstone;” <sup>8</sup>and, “A stone over which  
men stumble and a rock at which men take offense.” They stumble because they are  
disobedient to the word, to which [fate], indeed, they were appointed. <sup>9</sup>But you are “a  
chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people appointed to be [God’s] own  
possession, so that you might display the virtues of him” who called you out of darkness  
into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>Formerly you were “not a people,” but now you are “the  
people of God;” [formerly] you were “those who did not receive mercy,” but now you  
are “those who have received mercy.” (1 Pet. 2:4-10)

### **Introduction**

Back in the 1970’s, Alex Haley wrote an award winning book entitled, *Roots*. It was the story of Alex Haley’s ancestors whom he traced back to Africa.

The first part of *Roots* focuses upon the life of a young African boy named Kunta. Kunta was kidnapped by a rival tribe and sold to white slave traders operating along the coast of West Africa. The young boy survives the torturous voyage in the hold of a slave ship that transports him to the West Indies and eventually to South Carolina, where he was purchased by a southern plantation owner. Not only was this young African robbed of his freedom, he was also robbed of his identity: he was given a new English name, “Jack,” and was forbidden to use his African name, Kunta. You find the same thing occurring in the case of Daniel and his three fellow Hebrew captives: the Babylonians give them new names, new identities.

Here are two examples of the same phenomenon: the effort to sever the man from his past and create for him a whole new identity, in order to exploit him for the slave master’s purposes. In a far more subtle way the world seeks to do the same thing to you as a Christian: it seeks to make you lose sight of your Christian identity and conform to the identity of the world around you. Because of the pressures and distractions of the world, we must pause to reflect upon our Christian identity and become re-oriented to it.

### **I. You are the Recipient of God’s Saving Grace**

Peter describes us as Christians as coming to the Stone that men reject (vs. 4.) This is the illustration Peter employs: In preparing the foundation for a house, men look for a suitable cornerstone. They come to the quarry, but in their search they reject the very stone God has selected to be the chief cornerstone of the

house He is building. But, unlike the world, you recognize the value of this stone—which is the Lord Jesus Christ—and you acknowledge Him to be the cornerstone selected by God, note 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, *“we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles; <sup>24</sup>but for those who are called, (both Jews and Greeks,) Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

Verses 7-8 now contrasts our status as Christians with the status of the world. *“Now the honor is for you who believe”* (vs. 7.) The result of believing in Christ and building your life upon Him is the blessing of participating in His honor, the honor conferred upon Him by God His Father, as our Lord Jesus promises: *“If any man would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any man serves me, the Father will honor him”* (Jn. 12:26.) Then Peter continues,

*... but for the unbelievers, “The stone that the builders rejected, this very one has become the chief cornerstone;”<sup>8</sup> and, “A stone over which men stumble and a rock at which men take offense.” They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, to which fate, indeed, they were appointed.* (1 Pet. 2:7b-8)

For those who reject Christ there is appointed dishonor and shame. There is the shame of having made the wrong choice when one chose to reject Christ: *“the stone that the builders [“the builders” represent those who reject Christ] rejected, this very one has become the chief cornerstone.”* Then there is the shame of “tripping,” or “stumbling” over this Stone and falling flat on one’s face in the dust. This very stone that is chosen by God to be the chief cornerstone is described as being *“a stone over which men stumble”*—a “stone” over which men stumble and fall. Peter elaborates by stating, *“They stumble because they are disobedient to the word.”* That is to say, their rejection of the word—their rejection of the message of salvation by Christ, is due to their state of disobedience, a condition they do not want to forsake in favor of becoming a disciple of Christ. We must remember that the message of the gospel includes the call for surrender to Christ: *“Then he called to himself the [whole] crowd [along] with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’”* (Mk. 8:34.) Peter goes on to indicate that God has ordained that this consequence of shame and humiliation shall, indeed, be the fate of those who reject the message of the gospel and refuse to come to Christ. This is what he means when he writes, *“They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, to which fate, indeed, they were appointed.”* Those who reject the gospel stumble over it, (i.e.; they will be brought to ultimate shame and humiliation;) this “stumbling” (this shame and humiliation) is the consequence God has ordained for those who reject the gospel.

Turning from those who reject Christ to those who receive Him, the Apostle Peter declares,

*But you are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people appointed to be [God’s] own possession, so that you might display the virtues of him” who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9)*

Peter emphasizes that the Christian’s redemption is all of God’s grace, as does also the Apostle Paul:

*It is because of him [i.e.; God the Father] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:30-31)*

Here, then, is the first thing to remember about our Christian identity: we are the recipients of God’s sovereign grace. What the Apostle writes of the Thessalonian Christians is equally true of all Christians:

*But we are bound to always thank God for you, brethren loved by the Lord, because **God chose you from the beginning for salvation ...** <sup>14</sup>**he called you to this through our gospel, so that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. 2:13-14)***

In light of what Scripture teaches with regard to our Christian identity, we may join the hymn writer, John Newton, in singing,

Savior, since of Zion’s city,  
I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Your Name.

## **II. You are the Recipient of God’s Intimate Fellowship**

Peter goes on to describe believers as “*living stones*” that are being built into “*a spiritual house*” (vs. 5.) Just as King Solomon during the Old Testament era constructed a temple of stone to “house” the presence of the LORD; so the church of Jesus Christ is being constructed to be the residence of the living God. Writing to the Ephesian Christians, (especially emphasizing those who had come out of a Gentile pagan background,) the Apostle Paul declares,

*So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the family of God. <sup>20</sup>You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you also are being built together [with the saints] [“saints” here is a reference to the Old Testament covenant community] *to become the place where God dwells by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)**

The Lord Jesus Himself had previously declared to His disciples, *“If a man loves me, he will obey my teaching; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and live with him”* (Jn. 14:23.)

The church of Jesus Christ—composed of all true believers in Him—is defined as being *“a people appointed to be [God’s] own possession”* (vs. 9.) By the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, God has purchased us to be His own possession, as the Apostle Paul informs the Corinthian Christians:

*Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You do not belong to yourself; <sup>20</sup>you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body.* (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

By His Holy Spirit, God gives us the assurance that we belong to Him:

*You also were allotted to him—having heard the word of truth, that is, the gospel by which you are saved, and having believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. <sup>14</sup>He is a “deposit” guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of [God’s] possession, to the praise of his glory.* (Eph. 1:13-14)

In Ephesians 1:14 the Holy Spirit is described as being a *“deposit”* that has been given to us, verifying the fact that we have been purchased by God to be His own possession and that He will finally bring us into the fullness of that divine salvation for which He has called us. The Holy Spirit causes the Christian to remain in Christ and He causes us to return to Christ when we go astray, this is the meaning of Paul’s testimony recorded in Romans 8:14 when he speaks of the Christian as being *“led by the Spirit,”* and declares, *“those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*

Peter further identifies the church of Jesus Christ as being *“the people of God”* (vs. 10.) The teaching of Scripture is that the body of believers in Christ are not merely God’s servants who have a place in His household, but we are His own dear children who are members of His family. The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to address God with confidence as his heavenly Father:

*... you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.* (Rom. 8:15-16)

Here, then, is the second thing to remember about our Christian identity: we are the recipients of God’s intimate fellowship, as the Apostle John exclaims:

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ... <sup>2</sup>Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that*

*when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* (1 Jn. 3:1a-2)

In light of what Scripture teaches with regard to our Christian identity, we may join the hymn writer, Hattie E. Buell, in singing:

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,  
A sinner by choice, and an alien by birth!  
But I've been adopted, my name's written down,  
An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.  
I'm a child of the King, a child of the King,  
With Jesus my Savior, I'm a child of the King.

### **III. You are the Recipient of God's Holy Calling**

Peter identifies believers in Christ as being a part of *"a holy priesthood"* (vs. 5.) Just as the Levites of the Old Testament era were chosen by God to serve in His temple as priests (offering up incense and sacrifices), so are we called by God to serve Him in the same capacity.

We do not offer up incense, we offer up prayers of praise and intercession, which the Old Testament incense represented. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us as Christians: *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name"* (Heb. 13:15.) The Apostle Paul expresses to the Philippian church his confidence in the effectiveness of their prayers on his behalf: *"I know that, through your prayers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this will be my deliverance"* (Phil. 1:19.)

We do not offer up animal sacrifices to God, we offer up our body (representing our life and all of our activities) to God: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship"* (Rom. 12:1.) We as Christians are called to offer up deeds of righteousness and compassion as acceptable offerings to God: *"do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Heb. 13:16.)

The church of Christ is further defined as being *"a royal priesthood"* (vs. 9.) Not only are we called to render ministry to God, (carrying on a ministry of service similar to that of the Old Testament priest,) we are also called to reign with God. We do so as we fulfill the original creation mandate as given in Genesis 1:28, *"And God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* As Christians, we are to carry out the original mandate given to Adam and Eve to the glory of God; in practical terms, this means learning about God's creation,

harnessing the powers inherent in the creation, subduing the creation, and using it in service to God and to our neighbor to the glory of God. In the future, we shall share in Christ's rule over the world to come: *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne"* (Rev. 3:21.) In the age to come we will join with Christ in exercising dominion over the new creation to the glory and praise of God our Father.

Our Christian calling is further described as the calling to *"display the virtues of him who called you"* (vs. 9.) By the grace of God we are called to live a Christ-like life, and in so doing we will be reflecting and exhibiting the very virtues of God Himself.

Here, then, is the third thing to remember about our Christian identity: we are the recipients of God's holy calling: *"[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace"* (2 Tim. 1:9.) In the light of our Christian identity, we may join with the hymn writer, Albert Orsbon, in singing:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,  
All his wonderful passion and purity.  
O Holy Spirit divine,  
All my nature refine,  
Until the beauty of Jesus is seen in me.

## **Conclusion**

Because of the pressures and distractions of this present world, it is important that we pause and reflect upon our Christian identity. May our Christian identity, as it is defined for us by the Apostle Peter be reinforced in our minds; and where we have lost sight of that identity, may we realign our mind and life with it.

Remember the young African, Kunta, and how the slave master sought to sever him from his true identity so as to all the more easily exploit him. Be advised that the devil seeks to do the very same thing to us. We dare not allow ourselves to lose sight of our true identity as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.