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For the Life of the World

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Chosen as His Own

Dr. David P. Scaer



God's promises to His Israel in choosing them as His royal priesthood have now been given to the church. Believers in Christ are now the true sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so we share in the inheritance that was given to Israel. This inheritance was perfected and purchased with a price. Our salvation cost Him something. "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Justification of sinners by grace through faith was the most recognizably Lutheran doctrine emerging from the Reformation. A close second was the universal priesthood that all Christians by faith equally share in the benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Simply put, what belongs to Christ belongs without distinction to all Christians. To put it another way, the priesthood of believers is the reverse side of justification that God for Christ's sake forgives believers. And so these two concepts are like two sides of one coin.

This doctrine is not strictly a New Testament teaching but was taken over from the Old Testament and applied by the Apostle Peter in his first epistle to churches in what is now Turkey. These Christians were being persecuted most probably for refusing to engage in emperor worship, which was the patriotic duty expected of all subjects to the Roman Empire. This was impossible for Christians for whom Christ was the only object of their devotion. For this they paid dearly and the price was persecution. Our lot is no different. Privilege and persecution for Christians

go together. In many places of the world Christians are suffering for their faith.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is derived from 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Also important is what follows in verse 10: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Unlike most other epistles, 1 Peter was an encyclical epistle

sent to many churches and not just one. This may account for its formal style. It is well organized. Most of the Christians in these churches had been pagans whom, Peter says, God had called out of darkness into His marvelous light. They had not chosen God, but He had chosen them for the royal priesthood, just as He has chosen us. It was not our choice or doing but God's. By grace we are God's chosen race, His royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

God did not do this by an act of omnipotence, the power by which He created and controls all things, but because He, as Peter says, ransomed us from our futile ways of living by the precious blood of Christ, who was the Lamb of God without blemish or spot. The imagery of Christ's death is that of the Passover lamb who was sacrificed to spare Israel's firstborn sons from death in their fleeing captivity in Egypt. Being chosen by God to be His people is simply another way of saying that we are justified by grace. The Church is the chosen race, an entirely new humanity created by baptism in Christ to take the place of the sinful race descended from Adam.

In English it is hard to grasp that the Greek word for "royal" in Greek is taken from the word for "kingdom." We might better grasp what Peter intends if the word "royal" was rendered as "kingly," though that might sound awkward to ears accustomed to hearing "royal priesthood." The words "king" and "kingdom" point to how Jesus described His work, death, and resurrection in the "kingdom of God" in the parables. This kingdom came to a pinnacle in Christ's crucifixion where His cross proclaimed Him as the king of the Jews. In His suffering He established the priesthood to which we by faith belong and so we suffer with Him. To make this clear Peter wrote to those first century Christians.

In speaking of the Church as the royal priesthood, Peter was extending God choosing the Old Testament Israel as His unique people. All peoples, races, and nations had been created by God, but He chose only Israel as His own people. Israel was different from all other nations. They were His private possession. They comprised their special place as God's own people by not leading other peoples

on the earth to the God who had chosen them. On occasion this happened (Tamar, Ruth, and Uriah—all progenitors of Jesus—were non-Jews and still they believed), but rarely. Rather than being a light to the nations to lead them to God, Israel continually succumbed to the worship of false gods. Instead of worshiping and testifying to the God who made heaven and earth, they gave themselves over to idols made of carved stone and wood and they fell back into the darkness of unbelief out of which God had called them, and so they forfeited their election as the royal priesthood. We Christians are not immune from the temptation to denounce the faith. That's the reason Peter wrote this epistle.

God's promises to His Israel in choosing them as His royal priesthood have now been given to the Church. Believers in Christ are now the true sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so we share in the inheritance that was given to Israel. This inheritance was perfected and purchased with a price. Our salvation cost Him something.



"You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

As Peter approaches the end of his epistle to these first century Christians, he speaks of himself in three ways: first as an apostle, then a pastor, and finally and most importantly as a member in the

priesthood of all believers. "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly" (1 Peter 5:1-2). "Elder" is a New Testament word for a pastor, and Peter sees himself as a fellow pastor who with others serves the royal priesthood. He is also an apostle and in writing to these Christians he was entitled to say that he had seen the resurrected Christ. Strikingly, he presents himself as a witness of Christ's sufferings and so identifies with persecution these early Christian were undergoing. Soon after Peter wrote this letter, he himself would be crucified in an upside down position.

Pastors are given Christ's role as shepherds (that's what the word "pastor" means) in tending to the Church, which Peter calls the flock of God, His chosen people and royal priesthood. These pastors are to do so with the same patience that Christ had, and to live the kind of life He led. As the Lord's first apostle, a missionary, and an inspired writer of two books in the New Testament, there is every reason to think that in the next world Peter would be given a special reward. But this is not the way Peter sees it. Instead, he includes himself with the other pastors and the people in participating in a common reward: sharing in the glory that is going to be revealed. Believers come to life in confessing what we believe in the most difficult circumstances, evoking contempt from the world. In the next life, suffering for the faith will be replaced with the glory that only belongs to Christ. Here apostles, pastors, and people—the royal priesthood—will all be one. 🏠

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