

The Kind of Christians we are or Should Be

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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Summary

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's identity as a Christian, as revealed in 1 Peter 2:9. Tozer warns against letting the world define who Christians are and encourages them to embrace their true identity as God's chosen people. Tozer also discusses the identity and purpose of the royal priesthood as revealed in the Bible, highlighting that Christians are not just individuals but a new order of humans with a dual nature as both priests and a holy nation. Understanding one's identity and purpose as a believer is crucial for resisting the devil and the world's interest in self-discovery.

Message

In 1 Peter, second chapter, verses eight, nine and ten, Peter had been talking about certain ones to whom Jesus Christ was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, who stumbled at the Word in their disobedience. Then he used that small but highly meaningful word, but, ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

One of the ancient moral teachers of the past, one who was very dear to the Christians of the first centuries owing to the fact that truth is all one piece, and if a thing is true, it is true anyway, so that, as the brother once told me, a bee can gather honey, not only from a flower but from a weed. So, the early Christian church by a kind of affinity, accepted one of those moral teachers not on the level of inspired truth, but sort of as a helpful side message. I refer to Epictetus.

And one of his doctrines was this. I give it to you as an illustration of what I'm to say to follow. And I give you only a running translation of it rather than an exact verbatim declaration. He said that the first thing about a man was that he was a human being, that that was first, that he was a man. And he said that you could discover what a man ought to be by discovering what the nature of the man is.

Just as you can pick up a hammer and, if you're reasonably intelligent, and all my audience is, you could deduct what the hammer was for by holding it in your hand. You would know that that thing wasn't shaped to saw a board off with or open a can of salmon. You would deduce from that that it

was to be used to pound in nails. Or if you pick up a saw, and you would deduce from the shape of the saw that the nature of the saw, that it was not made to pound in nails, but to saw lumber.

So said the old man, we deduce from the nature of man, what kind of person or what kind of being he ought to be. And to be a man is the first responsibility of a human being. Then he said, having settled that, then we can know our duties. Now, that's as far as he went. The Bible has little to say about duties, privileges in the Bible, but he said duty. And he said, we can know our duties by figuring what we are and what facets of our humanhood, our manhood, which way they turn. For instance, he said now, settling that you're a human being, a man, and that your highest privilege and responsibility is to develop yourself as a human being.

Now again, following that, you can know what that development is by figuring your relationships. He said, first, you're a son or a daughter. And the fact of sonship implies certain obligations and duties and responsibilities toward your parents. Then he said again, you're a husband or a wife. And the fact of wifehood or husbandhood implies certain responsibility toward them. And the fact then that you're a citizen implies certain responsibility toward the state; that you're a father, certain responsibility toward your children and so on.

Now, that is not highly inspired. You can find that out if you just churn up a little of the gray matter that's in your head. And somehow or other the church liked that and use to read that. Now, not I say on the level with inspired truth, but as a helpful thing as we read Benjamin Franklin or something. They liked it. Now with that as a little backdrop of illustration, let me point out to you here what Peter said. He said, you're a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.

Now, just as Epictetus says that the first thing is, you're a man, and after that you figure out your responsibilities as a man. Peter says the first thing about you is you're a Christian. He takes the manhood for granted, he begins where Epictetus ended and says, being born again, that we are born again or begotten again, he calls it, unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's in the opening part of the chapter. And in the latter part of the first chapter, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

He begins not with our basic humanhood. He begins with our basic Christianity, that we are born another time; that we're now Christians. And he says now, we'll take that for granted. Then he goes on to show that as Christians there are at least four, he certainly doesn't give us all here, but he says, there are at least four facets to your nature and four relationships. There are four things that you are, just as Epictetus is man, is a husband, or a citizen, or both, or a father. Just as he has these various relationships, so as a Christian, you have various relationships; you are as a

Christian, a number of things. And you can figure out your duty and your privileges by seeing what you are.

Let's notice here, he said, now, as a Christian, you belong to a company which God calls a chosen generation. He applied all the terms of the Old Testament Israel to the New Testament Church, only he raised them up onto another level, and made them spiritual. Israel was called a chosen seed, and we even sing now, you chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransom from the fall. And Peter says, now you Christians have various facets to your nature. There are various things you are and one of them is you're a chosen generation.

Now, that word generation there doesn't mean descent in the sense that we mean it nor does it mean a time such as we say, this generation. But it means a breed, if you'll allow that rather ugly word for such a wonderful thing as being born of God. It means a breed, a species. He says that you Christians are a chosen species. You are a new breed of human. We start with your humanity, but we go on to your new birth. And that constitutes you a new breed of humans, as completely different from the fallen race of Adam, as though you belonged on another world.

You are a chosen breed, a chosen generation of people. Now that's what we are. And just as Epictetus' man could figure out his responsibilities to the state by remembering that he's a citizen, so we Christians can figure out our responsibilities somewhat, and privileges by remembering that we are a new breed of human. I know the world will laugh at that and they have good reason to laugh the way some of us act. We act very much like the old barnyard scrubs that we used to be. But God says that we are nevertheless a new, a chosen generation, a select generation.

Just as men select breeds and produce the finest, God has, not by building on Adam, but by rebirth from above, created a new generation of humans. And He said, now there's your responsibility and there's your privilege. That's how you can figure out how you are to be; and what kind of person you are to be by remembering who you are. If God's people only could remember who they were. We let the world tell us what we are. We let our government tell us what we are. To the world, we're simply religious people. To our government, we're taxpayers and voters. But God says that we're more than that. We're that, certainly, certainly we are.

We're citizens. And as citizens, we vote. We pay taxes. We pay taxes anyway, whether we vote or not. But we are more than that we are a chosen generation; the real born-again Christian is. He belongs to a new school of humanity, a new level of humanity, a new breed of humanity, having been born from above and still being human. A twice-born human generation is what the Christians are. That ought to give us pause and ought to give us, as they say, food for thought, what kind of people we ought to be.

The priests of the Old Testament were not royal priests. The royal line was the Judah line, and the priestly line was the Levitical line. But the New Testament Christian is neither of Judah or Levi or Dan or any of the rest. He is of a new order of human, twice-born human, and one of his functions is to act as a priest. And because he's born of royal seed, he's a royal priest.

So now, if you will think of yourself like that and not let the world tell you what you are; not let the books on psychology tell you what you are but go to God's word and find out what you are as a believing man and a Christian, a follower of Christ. You belong to a royal priesthood. And the priesthood now lies in the hands of the individual Christians. It is not an order of people apart. The church is the priesthood, and every Christian is his own priest. That's very hard for some people to understand, that every Christian is a priest and not only a priest, but a royal priest. But he says more. He says, you're also a royal priesthood.

Now, that was familiar to the Old Testament. They had a priesthood. Those who could, approached God, officially approached God for the people. They were the priests, and they came out of only one line. Not all could be priests, so even Jesus could not have been an Old Testament priest because He belonged to the line of Judah. And not only that, but they knew what a priesthood was. It consisted of certain orders of men, or an order of men, who offered sacrifices and made prayers and stood between God and the people as a priesthood.

But now he says, you are a priesthood; you Christians now are a priesthood. That's the other facet of your nature. The other direction your life moves, you are priests, and not only priests, but you are royal priests. For that reason, we do not need the priests of the Old Testament temple. We do not need the priests of Buddhism nor the priests of the Catholic Church. We need no priests because we are ourselves priests. Priests don't go to priests for help. We are our own priests. And we are constituted so by virtue of the fact that we belong to a new order of humans, a new breed of the human race. The old humans we are, but new humans we are also.

And the day will be when the old humanity shall pass away as the cocoon from the butterfly. And all that you are and that you spend so much money and time on and boast so about, all your old Adamic generation will pass off from you as a cocoon, and you will spring up into a new life with only the new part of you alive forevermore. And the old shall die and pass away. So, we are a new generation and a chosen one, but we are also a royal priesthood.

And then says the Scripture you're a holy nation. The church is here thought of as a nation. That Jesus Christ as our Lord and King, and as Israel was a holy nation in the midst of the nations but not part of the nation. So, the church, the true Church of Christ is a holy nation, dwelling in the midst of the nations, but not part of the nation.

Now, if we think of ourselves like that, I recommend that you sit down sometime and think about what you are, just think about it. You say you don't want to get interested in yourself. You'd better, because the devil is and the world is, so you'd better. And if you're a believer in Christ, you'd better sit down and in the presence of God quietly think with the Scriptures open before you what you are. As a born-again man, what the different relationships are that you hold and what facets of your nature there are.

One of them is that you belong to a separated nation. Holy here has to do with ceremonially separated as well as morally pure. Just as Israel dwelt in the middle of the nations, part of the world, but not a part of the nations, so we now as a new priesthood, a royal priesthood, compose a nation, a new nation, a spiritual nation within the world.

They say that if you take a globe of the world and turn it so the most land area is visible, and the least water area so as the most land visible to you from where you sit. Right in the geographic center of that vast land area will be Palestine. God said in the midst of the earth, and He meant what He said.

And Israel was a nation apart, cut off to the south and to the north and to the east and to the west by carefully defined boundaries. And she lived a people apart in the midst of the nation; and her curse came when she forgot her holy, national status and began to intermarry and intermingle with the world around about her. Then God turned that same world loose on her, and her armies came in and destroyed her, so that Jerusalem alone, they say, was destroyed 70 times in history.

Now my friend, if you will think of, as a Christian, what you are, you belong to a holy nation. And you can't afford to fuss with any of the nationals in this new race, this new priesthood, this new nation, you can't afford to have anything at odds if you can get out of it with anybody. But love everybody and live in harmony so far as you're able to do it with everybody, because we're part of the nation and a holy nation, separated from the world. Christianity in our day doesn't see this. We try to dovetail in and gear in and blend in; the sharp outlines are gone and there's a cowardly blending.

God has stood the light on one side and said, let be light and on the other He said, let there be darkness. And he called the one day and the other night, and God has meant that division to be down the years. But we're living now in an unholy twilight where there can be discovered very little from that wholly light and not too much that's wholly dark. For even sin has taken some of the shining robes of Christianity and disguised its filthiness. But God's people ought to see to it that they are what God says they are. We are what He says we are, a holy nation, a separated nation, living in the midst of the world, but absolutely apart from it.

And the fourth thing, Peter said was, a peculiar people. And of course, a peculiar people was the-- peculiar was the old word 350 some years ago that was translated; peculiar meant queer. It means queer now, but then it meant a people for a position; they bought people, a purchased people. And that's what it meant then. It doesn't mean that now. Peculiar now, if a fellow does strange things they say he is peculiar. If he has, idiosyncrasies, I think is the word they use now, personality problems.

A queer man is a man with a personality problem. But that's not what the Bible means. The Bible means by peculiar, a purchased people, and it was the term God used of Israel back in Deuteronomy 7. They were purchased by the blood of the sacrificial lamb and brought out a peculiar people taken unto God Himself. And that's what Christians are.

The world says you bigoted people full of pride. Who do you think you are that you should claim to be the people of God in any particular sense? Isn't God the Father of all men? The answer is no. Don't try to apologize. Just say no. Don't quote four or five authorities and soften it down. Just say no, because you know that God is not the Father of all people. He's the Father of such as believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And He takes this new breed of people, this born from above breed that constitutes a royal priesthood and a chosen generation and a peculiar people; He takes them unto Himself in a way that the peoples of the world are never taken.

You have a perfect right to stand on God's truth on that. And if they say, who do you think you are? Why you say, I know who I am by the mercy of God, because He says, that which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God, which had not obtained mercy but now have attained mercy. Verse ten, you can write in the back of your wallet or engrave it on the tablets of your heart, because this is yours if you're a true Christian. In time past you were not a royal, a chosen, a holy people, but now are the people of God, which had not attained mercy, but now have attained mercy.

So, we Christians, this Communion Sunday morning, ought to think of ourselves as being what God says we are. We ought not to let false modesty or doubts, or unbelief prevent us from accepting God's appraisal of us and putting ourselves in faith and humility where God puts us. And if we're not there we can get there. For the door of mercy stands wide open for all that will come.

A people for His own possession, a peculiar, a marked-off people, constituting a nation apart of priests, royal priests, rising out of this new thing which is born in the midst of the earth, the church. Father, we pray Thy blessing upon this Word.