Peculiar?

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." 1 Peter 2:9, ESV

Many years ago, I taught through Peter's first epistle using the King James Version. How many years ago, I no longer remember. But I do remember coming to one particular expression in the second chapter: *"a peculiar people."*

Even then, the word needed some explanation.

Peter was not saying that Christians are supposed to be odd. He was not telling us to be strange, weird, eccentric, or deliberately different simply for the sake of being different. There have always been Christians who seemed almost to take pride in being peculiar in that sense, as though unusual behavior were evidence of unusual holiness.

That is not Peter's point.

The older English word carried an idea largely lost in ordinary usage today. Something peculiar to someone belonged particularly to that person. It was his own. That is why newer translations express Peter's words as *"His own special people"* or, as the ESV puts it, *"a people for his own possession."*

That changes the question.

Instead of asking, "What makes Christians different?" perhaps we should first ask, "To whom do Christians belong?"

Peter's answer is unmistakable.

We belong to God.

That truth alone deserves more thought than we usually give it. We speak readily of *our* salvation, *our* faith, *our* eternal life, and *our* inheritance. All of those expressions are proper. But before considering what belongs to us because of salvation, Peter reminds us that we belong to Someone else.

We are His possession.

That means Christianity is not merely something added to a life that remains fundamentally our own. Christ is not an accessory to an otherwise independent existence. The redeemed person has changed ownership. Our lives, our bodies, our abilities, our possessions, our days, and even our futures belong to the God who has made us His own.

But possessions are acquired, and that raises another question: What did God pay for His people?

Peter has already answered that question. Only a few verses earlier he wrote:

"knowing that 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." 1 Peter 1:18–19, ESV

There is the price.

Not silver.

Not gold.

Not anything this world possesses or could ever accumulate. There is no earthly currency by which sinners could purchase their freedom, and no treasure we could offer God to make ourselves His.

We were ransomed *"with the precious blood of Christ."*

Suddenly that old word *peculiar* does not seem peculiar at all.

The wonder is not that Christians sometimes appear different from the world. Of course they should. Those who belong to God cannot continue indefinitely living as though they belong to themselves. But our difference is the consequence, not the foundation. We are not His because we are different. We are different because we are His.

And we are His because we have been purchased.

That should change the way we think about ourselves. The Christian does not possess an independent life into which God has merely been invited. We have been redeemed from bondage and brought into the possession of another. We have no higher claim upon ourselves than the claim of the One who redeemed us.

So perhaps the old King James expression is worth remembering after all.

We really are *"a peculiar people."*

Not because we are odd.

Not because we are strange.

But because we are His.

And the price of that possession was the precious blood of Christ.

Just a thought.

JOSHUA HOUSE BOOKS

John L. Wheeler

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