

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Select People For God's Purpose

by Dan Trygg

"For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; and *Yahweh has chosen you* (taken a keen look at, examined, tested) to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

Deuteronomy 7:6

"You did not choose Me, but *I chose you*, and placed you, in order that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you."

John 15:16

"And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but *choice* and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... ⁹ But *you are a select kind*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

1 Peter 2:4,5,9-12

We saw, in the first few verses of chapter one, how Peter described us a "select sojourners of dispersion". We are choice, top-of-the-line, outstanding visiting-strangers-living-alongside the "earthers", the ones who do not know Jesus. God scattered us according to foreknowledge among the inhabitants where we live. This has been done by the setting-apart-work of the Holy Spirit unto the hearing-under obedience to Christ, and sprinkling with His blood. In other words, we are the right people for the right job at the right time, set apart for this task by the Holy Spirit for listening to Jesus the Messiah. Sprinkling with blood was used in setting apart the people of Israel unto God at Mount Sinai. As they were sprinkled they declared, "We will obey everything Yahweh has commanded us", and Moses declared, "This is the blood of the covenant Yahweh has made with you" (Ex. 24:6-8). The priests, and even the tabernacle itself, was sanctified (set apart) for their special function by sprinkling with blood and with oil (Lev. 8). The sprinkling of blood was a part of the ordination of Aaron and his sons to be priests. This would have brought to mind that they, the recipients of the letter, ...and we, as well..., have also been set apart for a spiritual priesthood.

Yahweh had *chosen* Israel for a priestly purpose. They were chosen to be a nation set-apart unto Him, ...a nation that was to reveal His wisdom, goodness and power to other nations. God's plan was to bless all other nations through them. This went back to the covenant with Abraham, ...through his seed all the nations would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). In fact, in Deuteronomy 7, that is why God chose to work with them, ...because He had had a relationship with their forefathers, and had made a covenant with them. It was not because they were more numerous, or powerful, or even good (Deut. 9:4-7). Nevertheless, God intended to use *them* as a light to other nations, ...a light revealing His own character. For that reason, it was *critical* that they hold fast to Him and walk in His ways. His glory and blessing would come to pass and be revealed as they walked in obedience to Him. If they rejected Him and His ways, He would withdraw His blessing, and they would not be effective at God's intended purpose for them as a people.

Because of historical discussions in theology, we often tend to hear and see certain words in light of those discussions and debates, rather than being able to see them clearly in their Biblical setting. The word "choice" or "chosen" can often be difficult to see clearly, because of discussions about whether or not God chooses or elects people to salvation, ...and whether that election could be resisted or not. Could God select or choose us for something, and it not be fulfilled? Can we reject the purpose of God for our lives? Some people argue, "No, because He is God, anything He would choose or purpose for us would have to be fulfilled, because He is all-powerful." That sounds logical, *unless* God *designed* us to have a free will, ...a capacity to choose to embrace or resist His will. People caught up in this debate go back and forth, and marshal their favorite texts to support their arguments.

Let's just ask the question: Did Israel fulfill her calling to be a light to the nations, as God intended? Did she rise up to her calling, and become a paragon of obedience, and experience the blessings of God? Anyone who has read the Bible would have to admit that she did not. In fact, most of the history of the nation of Israel is about her failure to follow God, her resistance to His will, and the judgments and disasters that came upon her as a result of her disobedience. This is an important realization. It helps define how strictly we understand the concept of God's "choice" of someone for a purpose. For example, in Luke 7:30, it says that "the Pharisees and scribes rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John." What does that mean? It seems to say that God wanted them to get baptized by John the Baptist, but they chose not to.

There is another important observation to make. God is not choosing people to become Christians, in these passages. He is choosing them to *do something*, ...to fulfill a calling, to accomplish some purpose. When

Jesus spoke to His disciples on that last evening before His crucifixion, He said that He had chosen them and “placed them” in order that they might bear fruit, ...fruit that would remain. That is a very similar message to what Peter is saying in 1 Peter. They have been scattered according to God’s foreknowledge, placed as people from another country living alongside the “earththers”. **What was the purpose which God had in mind for them?** We see that clearly stated in 1 Peter 2. Using language that is directly from scriptures that referred to God’s purpose for Israel, he told these scattered exiles what His purpose for them was. **They were a chosen race** (select kind of people – cf. Isaiah 43:20), **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation** (cf. Ex. 19:6), **a people for God’s own possession** (Deut. 7:6). **Their purpose?** **To proclaim the virtues of the One calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light.**

That is God’s purpose for *your life*, too! Is it possible to *not* do what God wants you to do? Well, now that it is personal, and practical, ***you know* that it is possible, because you have *experienced* that reality in your own life!**

What does Peter have to say about it? He says, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.” **Peter’s response puts the responsibility upon us to make choices that will enable us to faithfully carry out God’s purpose for our lives.** He reminds us of our status as people who are foreigners who living alongside of others, people from another country who are living up close and personal right next to the “earththers”. This brings us right back to the first few verses of the book. We have been scattered by God’s foreknowledge, ...people He sees as “optimal people” to reveal Himself to these others who do not yet know Christ.

In order for us to be effective at that calling, we need to carefully guard and protect our personal integrity as children of God. We need to turn away from fleshly lusts that are fighting against our spiritual vitality. The word “lust” is a very negative, somewhat sexualized word in today’s language. The Greek is simply “strong desires of the flesh”. The “flesh” is not limited to sexuality. It is anything that brings us temporary pleasure on a physical or emotional level. It is a desire or yearning for pleasure, excitement or entertainment that is out of balance, a distraction or diversion from God’s will for our lives. Peter says that these strong desires are “at war with” our souls or selves. People who are not living in the power of the Spirit are very much attracted, enticed and often addicted to sensual desires and experiences. **To follow the Spirit, we must distance ourselves from, or hold back from, these strong desires so that we can seek, tune in to, and discern His leadings.** Paul says we must put aside these strong desires, even put to death some of the behaviors we may be engaged in that keep us tied in to those habits (Col. 3:5-14). Ephesians 4:17-19 tells us that people often are mindlessly engaged in these behaviors to distract from their inner emptiness, and seek endlessly for pleasurable experiences to cover and escape dealing with their soul-pain.

We are to be keeping our habitual conduct good and praiseworthy among the unbelievers. Note that *we* are expected to be in charge of this. **We are the gatekeepers and determiners of our own thoughts and behaviors. If there is an area we are struggling in, we are responsible to get help to address that area of need or weakness.** Hebrews 12:15 indicates that we also have a responsibility to look out for one another. We are to see that no one is lacking the grace of God to walk in victory. It is not only *my* personal problem, it is *our* team problem. We must be vigilant, watching out for one another, so that no one gets stuck, or beat down, in this warfare with evil spirits or the desires of the flesh. Galatians 6:1 says that if anyone is caught up in a stumble or a false step, we who are spiritual are to gently restore and equip that person to enable him or her to walk in freedom. **We all need one another’s help. God has given us one another to enable us to succeed in our spiritual walk.**

We are to be people who are actively engaged in good deeds. This is taught many times in the scriptures. Jesus said that we are the light of the world, and people ought to see good deeds in our lives, and glorify God for what we do (Matt. 5:14-16). Good works do not save us, but they are a fruit to be expected from our lives, and God will even bring such opportunities to help people into our lives (Eph. 2:8-10). Paul expected that Christians ought to be zealous for good deeds (Tit. 2:14), and he encouraged Titus to teach those he was discipling to be “prepared and ready for every good deed”, and they “ought to be taught to engage in good deeds, especially to meet essential needs” (Tit. 3:1,14). Such practical ministry will produce positive fruit, if we do not give up (Gal. 6:9,10). **Aside from these other positive reasons, Peter tells us that when the unbelievers would want to criticize or attack us, they would be compelled to glorify God as they behold the positive things we do** (2:12).

God has called us to represent Him before this watching world. We are exactly the people best suited for that. He has us placed in the right location, ...and He has given us everything we need to succeed at this. He wants us to think about the marvelous uncorruptible, unsullied, and unfading inheritance He has set aside for us, kept in heaven for us, to be revealed in the end. Right now, we are strangers in a hostile land, but God is guarding us along the way. God has a purpose for us being here, at this time. **We are to actively pursue all that God has for us, putting aside the old sensual way of living, and learning to be led by the Spirit. He will help us clean up our lives and grow to maturity. As we walk in the Spirit, we will become people who will bring God honor, praise and good will by how we live.**