

# The Christian's Warfare Part 11: A Biblical Perspective on Identity

*The Christian's Warfare*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10. We're continuing our series of messages called "The Christian's Warfare" from 2 Corinthians 10 as our starting point. It's been looking, really "The Christian's Warfare" is the main title today, subtitle is, "A Biblical Perspective on Identity." A biblical perspective on identity. This series of messages is really dealing with contemporary spiritual warfare and 2 Corinthians 10 is a passage that illustrates to us what spiritual warfare really looks like and so we've been reading it as a jumping off place to begin each message though we've spent a lot of time in a lot of other passages and this morning we're going to be spending a lot of time in the second chapter of Peter's first epistle but we're going to start here in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6. We'll read that together.

1 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

You see there the reality of spiritual warfare is the battlefield upon which spiritual warfare is waged is the human mind. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, Paul says, they're not of the flesh, but what they do is they pull down fortresses, they tear down things that are exalted against the knowledge of God. They tear down speculations. They take every thought captive. You see these speculations, these reasonings, the idea, faulty reasonings, these faulty conceptual frameworks that believers have in their minds that are like fortresses controlling the soul so that the truth of God's word cannot penetrate in your life because you have, you and I have strongholds, spiritual strongholds of unbelief, unbiblical thinking, these unbiblical concepts and belief structures are hindering the word

of God from advancing into our lives and so we are captivated by that and we are hindered. And so spiritual warfare is to demolish those strongholds by combating the lie with the truth and so that's what we're about in this series, we've been looking at the Christian's warfare and we've been looking at it in the sense of contemporary issues. We've been looking at particularly, we started out looking at both areas of contemporary issues, all of the confusion around the coronavirus and all of the different viewpoints there and trying to make sense of how does a Christian live and these kind of competing ideas, and that also particularly we spent a lot of time thinking about the racial strife in America, the difficulties we're having, the riots, the protests, the things that are happening that are troubling that we see in the news, the talk of justice. And so we spent the last few weeks talking about a biblical perspective on justice and today we turn to identity. We're trying to deal with big concepts biblically and I hope to, Lord willing, we'll be out next Sunday, Jess will be preaching, and then the following Sunday my plan is to try to put a point on some of these things, like a sharp point. We've been looking at all these biblical principles and I want to then take and apply it to some specific applications. I think that a lot of them you should be able to kind of come up with on your own as we looked at it, but in some areas I think we can give some more clarity. And so I hope to do that two weeks from today, Lord willing. But today another important foundational concept that messes things up in our lives when we don't think biblically, and that is the issue of identity. A biblical perspective on identity, that's the subject for this message.

We hear a lot about identity politics, critical race theory, intersectionality, and essentially those three terms all have this in common, the idea that you find your identity, you define yourself, who you are fundamentally by what group you belong to. Identity politics, critical race theory, intersectionality is all about identifying the groups and you're a part of a group and therefore what group you're a part of, that is your identity. So group distinctions like race, critical race theory. Critical theory actually goes beyond race, it's really identity politics and intersectionality applied across the board to all kinds of different distinctions. You know, you have race is certainly you can be grouped by race. You can be grouped by sex, gender, and of course, that's now become much more, that even brings a whole other set of groups, you are either, what, cis-gendered if you believe that if your gender is consistent with your biology which is what we just meant by your gender is what God made you, right? But the confusion is amazing and so now the way that identity politics and intersectionality works is you identify the group you're a part of and you decide if you're an oppressed minority or you're the oppressing majority. So there's two groups in all these different ways. It's A or B, you're either A or you're B. So race, if you are white, well, then in America you're a part of the oppressing majority. If you're male, strike number 2, you're a part of the oppressing majority. If you're cis-gendered, strike 3 you're out. You're a white male, cis-gendered, you are a part of an oppressing majority. So it's all about what group you're a part of. You're female, well, that's the most important thing about you. You're an Asian, of Asian background, that's the most important thing about you. You have some confusion about your, they would not say it that way, they would say you have gender fluidity, that's the most important thing about you.

It's really interesting that in professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Professing themselves to be against racism, they become racist. I mean, think about it, the most important thing today about a person is the color of their skin. I'm not saying that, that's what the culture is saying. If you're white, the most important thing about you is you're white. If you're black, the most important thing about you is you're black. Isn't that, how does that sound against what Martin Luther King said in his "I have a dream" speech, that people would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Isn't it amazing how sinners we can run into error, we can run away from one error and run all the way back into it on the other side? Running away from racism we become racist. Such a sad reality. But listen and those of you who belong to the Lord, you hear that and you echo it but we have to remember that these things have a way of seeping into our thinking in ways that are destructive to us spiritually. You know, we're to, as Paul said in Romans 12:2, not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The world exerts a continual conforming pressure. It is filled with ways of thinking, ways of defining reality, ways of thinking about God, ways of thinking about people, and it's continually inundating us with these things and if we are not diligent to fight that conforming influence by transforming reality, we will be unavoidably and often imperceptibly conformed to the world and according to our passage in 2 Corinthians 10, the truth of God will be hindered in going forth into our lives, and so we will have areas of bondage and darkness that the Lord wants us to have freedom and joy.

Even as we live in a world that's passing away and falling away, Christians are to be joyful. Last Sunday we looked at Matthew 5, the Beatitudes. Blessed are. Blessed are. Blessed are. That's, oh how happy are. Oh how happy are. Oh how happy are. Christians truly should be the happiest people of all not because of what's happening. Our happiness is joy. It's not rooted in, the word "happiness" in English comes from "happen." That's what happens makes you happy. No, our joy is rooted in the reality of who we are and what God has done and what he's doing. Our joy is rooted in the future and it comes back into the present but the future joy is so certain and so glorious they cannot help but infuse the present circumstance with real joy so that Christians truly, we can have joy in the midst of sorrow. I mean, we face the reality as it is and we can face it square in the eye, we can look it dead in the eye, we can see the evil of what cancer does, we can see the evil of what people do to one another and what crime and the devastation it brings, we can look it directly in the eye and we can have hope. We can face it, we can see it, and we can speak hope. We can tell the person that we're talking to who may be very very confused and defeated and taken captive by Satan, someone who's struggling. Listen, and some of you, you may be struggling with same-sex attraction, you may be struggling with gender issues, and let me tell you something, we are not here to condemn you for what you're struggling, we're not here to say you can't talk about that, we're saying please share it with brothers and sisters, we want to walk with you through it because, listen, what we want to do is apply the Gospel because we're all sinners, we're all struggling in various areas, and we all need to learn how to follow Jesus and the good news is Jesus and his word brings liberty and freedom. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. And so we can look at the realities of sin and the realities of what's happened in someone's life, the things that they've done themselves, the things that have been done to

them, and we can say God has a plan of how he's going to use this in your life for your good, for your incredible good, and for his glory. And we know it's true. And so we have the message of light in the midst of an incredibly dark world, so we don't think about these things that are going on as a means of condemning and thinking and looking down upon. No, we think about this, so we recognize it, we don't have it in our own minds, we don't allow it to affect our thinking, and we go forth with more urgency to deliver people who are captivated by the devil to do his will. We want to set them free.

So it's love and compassion that motivates us. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We're not condemned for our sins, neither would we condemn sinners. We encourage them to understand they're under the wrath of God and they need to repent and God will condemn every one of us who's not in Christ. But we have the message of hope and so this whole idea of identity, though, is one that really can trip us up and the question that we really need to ask ourselves, there are a couple of questions that are going to kind of frame our discussion and these are not the points yet, this is still the introduction: how do I see myself? When someone asks you, "Who are you? Tell me about yourself." What's the first thing that comes to mind? What's the first thing you want to share about who you are? How should I see myself? How should I see myself? How should I see others? How do I see others? How should I see others? This is the question of identity. The world is telling us that I should see myself as a part of a group and either as a victim or a perpetrator. Is that how God sees it? No, that's not how God sees it.

We acknowledge that there are realities to, there's grains of truth in these things, of course, that there are things, consequences of being parts of different groups. If you're a female, you're born a female versus a man, there are things that you can't do that a man can do, certain circumstances. I mean, there's less of those than there used to be. They still can't play in the NFL as far as I know. You know, I'm not watching much NFL these days. It could change, not likely to though because just the whole size issue. It can be hard to be big enough as a woman to play in the NFL. So, anyway, but as a man you can never have a baby and that's actually good news to me. But I know for a woman that's had a baby and the joy and we have some that are close to having babies again, and praise God for that, and the joy and delight of bringing a life into the world, carrying a child in the womb. I know when Patti was pregnant with Jonathan and Maggie and the joy she had and just seeing the glow and we see the glow, like I say, we have a couple ladies that are very, actually three that are very close in the next few weeks of having babies. We need to be praying for them. A couple of them are going to be presented today for members at the end of the service. But there are things we can't do because of just certain, the way God made us. There are things that we can't do because of the way, certain deficiencies or weaknesses or strengths that we lack that we just can't do certain things. But is that how you're to define yourself?

How ought I see myself? How I ought I see others? I want to make a couple of preliminary observations and then we're going to jump into a four-point outline. These are just preliminary observations. There are two of them but I think it's important. And this is, first of all, first preliminary observation: God greatly values diversity. God greatly

values diversity and you might make as a second line, he values the individual. We talked about he judges the individual, he judges individual actions, he judges the individual for each individual action, each individual word, but God loves individuals. He created diversity and he loves it. I mean, this is kind of mind blowing. You stop and think about this, think about creation, how diverse creation is. I mean, no matter where you look, the diversity is mindboggling. I mean, it's mind blowing and God made all of these different things. I mean, just animals for a moment. Think about the difference between, imagine for a moment the blue whale, the largest animal on earth. Now the guppy and all the stuff in between. The angler fish. I mean, I have to stop myself from going on to all the things that I would want to talk about. Just how does God think to make things so different and so wonderful? The hawk. The hummingbird. The elephant. The chipmunk. Multiply that thousands and thousands of times over. Maybe the elephant and the butterfly, think about that. Big elephant, a butterfly. Such strength and power, such apparent weakness, beauty. A snowflake. You know, you've probably heard that every snowflake is unique. Now just let that sink in for a moment. If you and I were creating this world, the last thing I would think to do is make snowflakes distinct. Who cares? Snow's great, it's coming down, awesome, but when they magnify snowflakes they're all amazingly ornate, structured, and yet different. How can anyone believe there's no God just looking at snowflakes? It's insanity. The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

So God is, he loves diversity though. He thought to make every snowflake that's ever fallen in history diverse. He likes to make people different. In his providential governance though we all came from one man and one woman, Adam and Eve, we looked at Acts 17, he defines when we're born, he defines where we live, the boundaries of our habitation. He makes us distinct over time where we have differences and truly ethnicity and race, though race is actually a construct, a social construct and it's not a reality, there's only really one race of human beings, Adam's race, there are beautiful and wonderful distinctions within that though. Think about that and God is glorified in that and what's an interesting thing is in heaven we're still going to have that. Revelation 7:9 says that gathered around the throne of God in heaven there will be those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

So God loves the diversity that he's created. Well, we ought to love the diversity he's created. We ought to love how he's created us. I mean, in a really godly way, like David said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." God knits you together in your mother's womb, he made you exactly what he wanted to make you. It may not be, so often it's not what we want to be, right? We wish we were taller. We wish we were smarter. We wish we were faster. We wish whatever. But it's right for you and me to have a biblical sense of self-appraisal. The Bible says, "Let no one think more highly of himself than he ought to think." But how you ought to think about yourself is you are unique, made in God's image as an image-bearer, made unique in different and distinct, with various characteristics exactly the way God wanted to make you. Now we all have responsibility to make the most of what he's given us to be faithful and diligent and to pursue wisdom and all that, but it doesn't lessen human responsibility but it's good to stop and thank him for what he's done. He hasn't made mistakes. If you are disabled, God made you for a

purpose. He gave you the disability he's given you for a purpose, for his glory, your good and the good of the body of Christ, the good of people.

So you don't have to glory in the weaknesses that we have in the sense of their weakness because some of these things, they are reflections of how sin has entered the world. If you're blind or you're deaf, you can't hear, you can't see, God doesn't really, in one sense, didn't will man to be like that but you can know that for whatever reason in this fallen world, he has a distinct purpose for that deficiency in your life and you can know that because Exodus 4 says that. When Moses says to the Lord, "Hey, send, here am I, send Aaron," essentially he says that and God says, you know, because he says, "You need to send Aaron, I don't speak well." And God says, "Who made the deaf, the dumb, and the blind? Did not I, the Lord? Do you think that I don't know that you have a problem speaking? I made you that way."

So God loves diversity, that's the first preliminary observation but God purposes unity. He loves diversity but he purposes unity so he loves unity and diversity and let me just say this, this is essentially because God is himself unity and diversity. Three persons, one God. Unity is not more important than the individuality. Three persons, the persons of God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, that is equally valuable to the unity of God, and the unity of God is equally valuable to the personality of God, Father, Son and Spirit. And so it's not surprising that he would make a world that is so diverse and then want to bring it together in unity in his Son and that's his purpose for all eternity, is to bring everything under subjection to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians 1 makes this point so beautifully at the end of the chapter. The summing up of all things in Christ.

So God purposes unity. Jesus before he died in John 13 to 17, his passion, his heart is the unity of his people that will start the unity of all creation, but it will be a unity that never loses individuality. There's an interesting verse, Revelation 2:17. It's in the letters to the churches where Jesus gives, where he speaks directly to the seven churches in Revelation. It's the church at Pergamum and they're in sin, they need to repent, and so he says, "Repent," and then he gives this promise that to everyone who is faithful and who overcomes, "I will give them a white stone with a name written on it which only the person that receives it will know." Do you get that? Everyone who belongs to Christ is going to receive something that's just between you and Jesus. That's how much he values the individual and yet you see how much he brings and glories in bringing all of us into unity. His prayer, the heartbeat of his prayer in John 17 is, "That they may be one, Father, even as We are One, that all the world may know that You sent Me."

So he purposes unity and think about this, just the beauty of how this, take an example of a symphony. That's diversity in unity. Unity in diversity. Think about the various instruments, how different they look, how different they sound. The tuba, violin. The flute, the cymbals. And yet you bring all of those very different sounds playing notes of melody and harmony and rhythm and you have a symphony. That's a picture of what God is doing. He's made each of us unique and every single person is different. Our DNA is different, there's no two people ever alike in our life. Well, then you add down to our life experiences, our backgrounds including our ethnicity, all of those things brought into it

and we are different and distinct and unique and there's a glory about the differences and the individuality, and we're to celebrate each person. Do you see how different we are than identity politics? You're not merely a member of a group, you are in God's eyes a precious individual as well. And then the identity politics fails in seeing what the real groups are. They're totally out of step with the Lord.

So those are two preliminary observations, now we come to the four points of the message this morning and we turn to 1 Peter 2. We're going to just kind of hit these quickly. The points are really clear and I think instructive for us. Before we read the verses, we're going to read verses 9 and 10, I want to mention to you a key word in the New Testament that's not actually in this passage but this is talking about the same idea, and the word is "koinonia." You've probably heard that word if you've been around the church long, you might have heard it. Koinonia. It's a Greek word. It means to, normally translated "fellowship, sharing," and the idea is that what you have in common. Interestingly enough, we get our English word "coin" from "koinonia," the koinos, actually the noun that koinonia is related to, and koinos means "common." So a coin, you give a silver coin with a picture of George Washington on it, that's a quarter, and so we all have in common that we give that value 25 cents. It's common currency. We have it in common. Koinonia is the idea that the people of God share fellowship in what they have in common. This is the balancing of that distinctiveness and uniqueness that we see in the body. And think about that for a moment, let me just say another word about that. You have, every one of us are different. We're made to look different. We come from different backgrounds. We have different life experiences. And we also have different spiritual gifts and you put all that together and no two people are alike. You've got a combination of various characteristics and spiritual giftedness but the spiritual giftedness and those things that God has put together as he says in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, Romans 12, he's put those gifts, he's given each of us different gifts so that we would ironically need one another. He has given different manifestations of the Spirit for the common good, 1 Corinthians 12, I think it's verse 7 or 8. It's for the common good and it's so that we would value one another, that we would in the same way a body values, the body values this, everybody should value their pinkie with some level of value. It does some things that you probably underestimate the value of your pinkie. You probably don't spend time reflecting on that. No, but seriously, you know, your little toe, your big toe. Boy, that's really an important, more important than you think, right? Your ankle. Your knee. Your pancreas. All of these things, they all have a part that is essential and if something happens to it, your whole self is going to be affected. This is why God gives spiritual gifts that are so different and distinct. You look at it, think about how different a pancreas is from a big toe and you can see the big toe thinking, "Well, I'm glad I'm not that thing. That's not fit to be seen. It needs to be hidden inside of some skin." And thankfully God did do that, right? But the big toe needs the pancreas. Every single member needs every single member and God has done this because he's a God who loves diversity and he loves unity. He purposes unity and diversity to manifest the glory of who he is and this is what he calls us to.

Koinonia. We share some things in common and this is what we're going to see. This is really illustrated in a powerful way in these two verses in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Peter is writing

to a basically Gentile audience, formerly these were not Jews, there are some Jews there but mostly Gentile believers. In chapter 1 we saw they were in the region of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, basically Asia Minor and that surrounding area. He is writing to this mostly Gentile church who were not a part of Israel or the covenants or the people of the nation of Israel, and he says this to them in 1 Peter 2:9,

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so 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 the people of God; [once] you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Four points quickly here. The first is: how are you to see yourself, how are you to see your identity? Essentially your identity is who you are in Christ and essentially the only identity question that really is of eternal significance is one. It's not what color is your skin. It's not what background you have. It's not your socioeconomic status, your education, your vocation, your family situation. No, the one identity issue that matters is do you belong to Jesus or do you not. That is the only thing and this is what's being said really forcefully and powerfully by the Apostle Peter right here. And so the first point is we have, our identity is in Christ, first, because and basically there are four points. Our identity is in Christ because, 1. we share a common history. We share a common history. Verse 10, once you were not a people but now you're the people of God. Once you had not received mercy. The reality was once we were not a people but now we are a people and this is true even for the Jews because the Jews find out that really being a part of Israel in the old covenant really wasn't a part of being Israel in the new covenant. Not all Israel is Israel, Paul's argument in Romans 9. That's why Isaac, not Ishmael. Jacob, not Esau. Not all Israel is Israel.

And you look at Ephesians 2, you might hold your place in 1 Peter 2 and turn to Ephesians 2 for just a moment. We have a common history. We have a common past. We all have a shared past that is more connected to us than our earthly family's shared past. It's of more significance and of greater reality, the shared past that every believer has with one another and what is that shared past? It is that once we were not the people of God, once we did not have mercy. Ephesians 2:1, this is our shared past, our common history. Why do we have identity in Christ? Because we have a common history. Verse 1 of Ephesians 2,

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked [look at our past] in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.



That's our common history, by nature children of wrath, under the righteous and holy judgment of God.

He goes on to elaborate on this a little more in the same passage, in the same chapter. Verse 12, well, verse 11, the first few words of verse 11 and then we'll jump down to verse 12.

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, [and skip down to verse 12 now because he continues the concept here] remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh... 12 ... that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

That's our past. We were without God and without hope in the world. That's our shared past and that's the most significant thing about our shared past. If you belong to Jesus Christ, this is the most significant detail about your past. I used to be under the wrath of God, separated from God, without hope and without God, and that's true of all my brothers and sisters. And we now have come to see that. The reality is the people out there that don't yet know Jesus, don't realize that. They don't see the reality of who they are but we've been given eyes to see, ears to hear. The Spirit awakened us and we saw that we are under the wrath of God and then we fled to Christ. If you've come to Jesus, this is what happened to you, and if you haven't come to Jesus, this is what needs to happen to you, you need to see the reality of your separation from God and the fact that his wrath is coming. It is upon everyone and the only hope is to run to Jesus.

But this is where we were. Once we were not a people, back to 1 Peter 2. Hold your place in Ephesians, we'll come back there shortly. That's our common history. The second point here is our common calling. Why do we have, why is our identity in Christ the most significant thing about us? Because we have not just a common history, we have a common calling. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. You're called by God. This is the effectual calling of God that brings salvation that has come through the outward call of someone proclaiming the Gospel to you, and if you have come to faith, this has happened to you. You have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light so that these things are true of you. You have a common calling. It's seen in these four wonderful phrases, beautiful phrases, descriptive phrases: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for God's own possession.

Peter uses four collective nouns to say this is your identity of your common calling. He says you're a part of one race, the chosen race. I said there's one race of human beings and physically that is true. There's only one race and to say that the differences of our ethnicity are racist is actually a misnomer and a social construct that really is rooted in Darwinian thinking. Unbiblical. It came out of Darwinism that thought there were different developing human beings being developed through different basically ape, you

know, progressions. That's where the idea of race came from and so it's a social construct, it's not a biblical concept. There's only one race, it's Adam's race. There are various ethnicities and tongues and people groups now because people live together and over time we began to resemble one another more and more and to be a little distinct and different physically and culturally. But the reality is that that one race is still one race, Adam's race, but what God is saying here is, listen, there's two races now. Physically there's only one but spiritual there's two and this is what's going to be eternal. Either you're of Adam's race or you're of Christ's race.

Everyone who comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ becomes a part of a chosen race. You're a part of a new humanity. This is why Paul calls Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15 the last Adam. The first Adam and the last Adam. Adam itself in Hebrew, it means "man," it means "redness" as well, but it means "man" and it speaks of coming from the earth. God formed man out of the dust of the earth and so adam means "man." And so the last adam is a new man, a new humanity, and so the question is which humanity are you in, the first adam or the second, the last, Christ? And here he's saying, "Listen, for everyone who's repented and placed their faith in Jesus, your identity is in the fact that you are a part of that chosen race."

And he adds four other nouns: a priesthood. I mean, four nouns total: race, priesthood, nation, people. Those are the four collective nouns: race, priesthood. We're a kingdom of priests. Every single Christian is a priest. You're part of a priesthood. You're to work together to worship God and to bring others into worshipping God to facilitate the worship of God. That's what we're about. That's our job. That's our real job. Whatever the other jobs that you may have, your real job is to facilitate worship to the one true God. You're a part of a priesthood. Secondarily you've got a vocation but that's only a means to the end of your calling to facilitate true worship of the one true God.

It's not just race and priesthood, it's nation now. It's ethne. It's a group. He's saying, "Don't think of yourself anymore primarily by your ethnicity, think of yourself now as a part of God's nation." America is not God's nation. It never has been. There's some things about it that are extraordinarily blessed by God and essentially it's this, I mentioned this in that thing I was telling you about I said on Wednesday with more detail, essentially America happened to in God's providential wisdom because there were the great, the Reformation happened and the stewarding of the Gospel went through England and Scotland and it changed the way people view humanity and the wisdom of the American experiment was this: men are sinful and power must be checked and corrected and this is the wisdom of America. This is why freedom is here and it's nowhere else like it in the world. This is the reality. You want to argue with that? Just look at reality and history, ask people from other countries and they will tell you there's more freedom here than anywhere else in the world. Voddie Baucham, born in South Central Los Angeles, black man, a pastor who now lives in Africa and is the Dean of a school, a Christian university in Africa, theology. I heard him preach a sermon recently where he said black people in America are freer and wealthier than black people in any other country in the world and it's not even close. Now I'm not saying that there's not injustice. We're not saying that but

what we're trying to see is, listen, we have to see reality and until we see reality, confusion hinders our abilities to pursue more justice.

It's clarity that we need, but for the Christian, what we have to have is a healthy holy detachment that says it doesn't really matter what happens to America. I mean, it does in some sense but it's a small thing because that's not who you and I are. That's not our nation. Our nation is we're part of the people of God, an eternal people. We're part of a nation whose foundations are rooted in eternity past and we're looking to eternity future. It's an unshakeable, we have received a kingdom, as the author of Hebrews says, you have come to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. That's who we are and so we have a freedom to then be in the world but not of the world, that we can see clearly. We can see lies around us, recognize them, speak truth in love and encourage more people to come into the true kingdom that matters.

So we have a common calling. It's seen in those four phrases: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people belonging to God. The noun is "people," the adjective is sometimes it's translated in the King James "peculiar." It does mean "for his possession. A people for the possession of God." We're to see ourselves, how do we see ourselves? We see ourselves as not our own. My life is not my own. If you belong to Christ, your life is not your own for you have been bought with a price. So glorify God in your bodies, that's our purpose. That's our calling. That's our identity. We have a common calling.

Thirdly, we have a common experience. He's clearly alluding to our salvation when he says, "who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We have a common history, a common calling because we have a common experience. We have been called out of darkness into his light. This is the miracle of regeneration which Peter describes in the previous chapter just a few verses back in chapter 1, verse 23, when he says to these same people who he's now telling are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, he says in verse 23 of chapter 1, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." You have been born again. You have been given life. Jesus said, "Except you're born again you cannot see the kingdom of God." And so believers, we share a common experience, a common birth, you could say, and this is much more significant a million times over than our common birth that we may share with other people, born in the same country, born in the same region, born in the same physical family. That pales in comparison to the reality of having the same birth in Christ by the Spirit.

So we have a common experience, called out of darkness into his light by his grace. We don't deserve that. We only deserve wrath and hell and yet the Lord has showered and lavished his grace on us. He's given light to blind eyes. He's given life to dead people who were dead in trespasses and sins, who were given over to the lusts of the flesh and the lust of the mind, to the pride of life, who were living for themselves and God gives you life, he gives you the awakening of your soul by the power of the work of regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Christ. That happens in your life, suddenly you move from darkness to light, death to life, and then if that's true, how could there be any experience in anyone's life that is more

significant to unite you to anyone else than that? It's not even close. What else matters? So you've had the same, you went to the same high school, you played the same sport, even getting married and living together, I mean, that's wonderful and it's so much better when you're believers but that's not the, even that, think about that. I've been married for 34 years now. You know, when you say that, do you find yourself saying that and thinking, "Man!" Every time you say it, "Like wow, I'm that old." What a privilege it is to walk through life with another human being in marriage, God's wonderful design. How glorious it is, how wonderful it is, what a treasure it is, how it is a picture of God's kindness. It's part of him making his image known in the world. "He made them in His image, male and female He created them," Genesis 1:26 and 27. There's something there about marriage and how even that provides an opportunity for the glory of God. It's also about maleness and femaleness even if you're not married. It's ultimately pictured in the body of Christ, though, the marriage that happens between the bridegroom and his bride. That's the one and when you're born into Christ, you now become a part of his bride. That is the most significant event experience that has happened to any of us if it's happened to us. And it's not close.

So we, our identity is with other believers and this is the fundamental reality because we have a common history, we have a common calling, we have a common experience, and fourthly, we have a common mission. We're to proclaim the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. This is what we've been chosen as a race to be. This is what we've been inaugurated as a priesthood to be. This is what we've been brought into a holy nation to do. This is why we belong to God so that we can proclaim the excellencies of him. The excellencies, the glory, the beauty.

This word "excellencies" is an interesting word. It pictures the reality of something being exactly what it's supposed to be. This word could be used in certain circumstances to mean like manliness of a real man. It's used in some context in other writings to talk about a horse, that the horse was excellent, it was what a horse is supposed to be. It's like the Secretariat of racehorses. This would be this word.

So when he says we're to proclaim the excellencies, what we're to do is we're to proclaim the fact that God is everything that he should be and more, everything that we could have ever imagined or hoped and more. That's our mission. That's what the world needs to hear. And so that's true of his commandments. This is why when we talk to someone about issues they're struggling with, you know, a man wants to leave his wife, a woman wants to leave her husband and they think they've found life in another relationship, we can go to them and say, "No, listen, you haven't. It feels like that but I'm telling you God's word is perfect." Someone's struggling with as I said earlier, sexual problems, they're struggling with drugs, whatever they're struggling with, listen, God's way is right. It's excellent. If you will build your life upon his word, if you will come, you have to come to his Son but if you come to his Son and build your life upon his word, you will find out that he's everything you ever could even imagine or dream for. He's everything and more. He's so wonderful that you could not imagine he could be like that.

That's what it is to follow Christ and you see why that's good news. That's not condemning. We don't look around at people to condemn them. If you do, then you're sinning. Self-righteousness. Examine your own heart. We're to be people whose disposition is love and forgiveness and kindness. Now we speak the truth in love because of that because their life depends on it, their well-being in this world and their eternal destiny. But we have a wonderful message and you and I are all called to that. If you belong to Christ, then we are brothers and sisters. That's who we are. That's the first thing about us and it should be the first thing that we think of and that we say, "Tell me about yourself." Okay. I mean, sometimes there's a wisdom about maybe if you're on an airplane and somebody asks you to tell them about what you do. I mean, you can start with your job. But it should get quickly to, "But you know what's most significant about me is I belong to Jesus Christ. He saved me. Do you know Him? I'd like to tell you about Him." That's what we're called to do. That's our mission and when we remember that, when we understand that that's our real identity, then we can live in this world and be in the world but not of the world, we can be around people who are very confused, the world's getting more and more confused in many ways as we speak, right? But we need to be getting not conformed to the world by the outside pressure of their thinking, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and as we become clearer on who we are, we have a message that is becoming more and more clear and more and more bright in our lives and on our lips and God will use it to bring more people, to call more people out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise and glorify and honor You. We thank You, Lord, for the way that Your word defines for us who we are, the fact that You love us and, Lord, it's true for every person in this room as we read earlier in 1 Timothy 2, You desire all men to be saved. The wonder, it doesn't negate Your electing purposes, we understand that, You make that clear, but in Your heart of hearts You also have a benevolent kindness toward all people and say, "Come and be saved. Come to Christ and be saved," so that nothing can hinder the person who would come to You except their own unbelief. Thank You, Lord, for Your kindness, Your goodness. Thank You that You are so much more excellent and wonderful than we ever imagined. And Lord, in reality as we get more into Your word and we grow more and we even go through suffering and we see Your faithfulness in it, we come to see that every day we come to see more and more how much more wonderful You are than we imagined. And Lord, we look forward to eternity, spending that time in Your presence every moment of every day through eternity, growing in the knowledge of Your glory and delighting in it even more. Lord Jesus, You are worthy. Help us to be the people You want us to be. Help us to be a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people who truly belong to You. And we pray this in Your name. Amen.*