Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer's Privileges, Part 6: Separation, Possession, Illumination…
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9b-10
Code: 60-22

As you know if you've been with us on Sunday nights, we have been having a glorious time in this wonderful epistle called 1 Peter, the first of two epistles written by that most favorite of the disciples of our Lord. We are in chapter 2. We are looking at verses 4 through 10 under the title of "Spiritual Privileges."

When I started the series five or six weeks ago, I had no idea how long it would take us to go through but I'm glad that we have spent this much time because of the tremendous richness of this great portion of Scripture. First Peter 2:4 to 10 and we'll be picking up our study from where we left off and moving ahead tonight.

Now remember in this wonderful letter written by Peter, he is addressing his thoughts to scattered Christians. They are under difficult circumstances. They are counting the cost and paying the price to live out their Christian experience in a hostile world. And in this particular section we have perhaps the heart of the encouragement of this letter. Because here the Apostle Peter lists the benefits that God has given us by His grace. We mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago that very often when we study the Word of God we talk about the cost of being a Christian. We've talked about it tonight. We're not talking about what it cost to be a Christian in this section, we're talking about what it pays. We're talking about the dividends, the benefits, the blessings. These are our spiritual privileges. These are our treasured possessions that belong to us as the children of God.

And I told you there's a sense in which Peter uses a sort of spiritual kaleidoscope. You remember when you were a child and you had a little kaleidoscope and you turned the end of it and the little colored stones made all different beautiful images. Well Peter takes basically the simple truths of salvation and keeps rotating the end of the kaleidoscope and rearranging those magnificent truths into patterns that are just beautiful beyond description. And every time he rotates the kaleidoscope we see another arrangement of the marvelous beauty of what is ours because we are Christ's. The basic jewels of salvation held up to the light of God's grace and rotated reveal majestic patterns of spiritual privilege. What is ours because we are Christ's. Nothing about duty here, nothing about responsibility. It's all about privilege.

Do you remember what keyed it? Verse 4, it all began with that phrase "and coming to Him." It all starts when we come to the Lord. Coming to Christ unfolds this kaleidoscope of spiritual privilege. Let me just quickly mention the ones that we've already noted.

The first spiritual privilege that Peter discussed was union with our Lord. Verse 5, we are living stones, built up as a spiritual house. We become the house in which God's Spirit dwells. We as living stones are joined together with THE living stone in verse 4. We are united with Him as living stones to a living stone. We are built up to be the very habitation of God. And we talked about that union with our Lord.

Secondly, we talked about accession to our Lord, or having access to Him. We noted in verse 5 that we are a holy priesthood. And as a holy priesthood we have access into His presence to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In fact, we spent two weeks on what it means to be a spiritual priest, what richness we saw there.

Thirdly, we discussed security in our Lord. Not only union in our Lord or union with our Lord, accession to our Lord, but security in our Lord. And we noted in verse 6 that at the end of the verse it says, "He who believes in Him shall not be disappointed." There is great security in knowing Christ. We will never be disappointed. We will never be disillusioned, we will never be let down. We are secure in the promise of His Word.

Fourthly, we discussed another spiritual privilege, affection for our Lord, verses 7 and 8. "This precious value," verse 7 says, and I pointed out at the time to you that what it really says, I believe in the original is, "To those who believe He is precious." And one of the great benefits of being a Christian is that Christ becomes precious to you and you have the privilege of loving Him. And love, of course, is the most exhilarating, the most thrilling, the most wonderful of all emotions and all expressions. And so it is a spiritual privilege to hold Christ precious and to love Him whom the world rejects.

And then fifthly we saw the spiritual privilege of election by our Lord. We noted in verse 9 that you are a chosen race. That He has chosen us purely on the basis of His own sovereign predetermination because He desired to love us and there is nothing in that act that has anything to do with us deserving it, or earning it, or being worthy of it in any way, shape or form. We have been loved purely as a result of His own choosing.

Sixthly, we discussed the spiritual privilege of dominion with our Lord. Not only are we a chosen race but we are a royal priesthood..not just a priesthood, not just a holy priesthood but a royal priesthood which indicates our dominion. We rule and we reign with Him.

Now Peter turns the kaleidoscope one more time and we come to the seventh spiritual privilege for tonight. Let's call it separation to our Lord...union with our Lord, access to our Lord, security in our Lord, affection for our Lord, election by our Lord, dominion with our Lord and now we have separation to our Lord. Would you notice verse 9? We are not only a chosen race, we are not only a royal

priesthood but we are a holy nation...a holy nation. The word "nation" is ethnos from which we get ethnic groups It simply means a people. We are a holy people. What does "holy" mean? It means separated...separate, set apart. We are a holy people.

Now did you remember that all through this passage Peter is drawing on his knowledge of what? The Old Testament. He is quoting and alluding to the Old Testament. And when he says that we are a holy nation, he no doubt has Exodus 19:6 in mind because that's exactly what it says regarding the people of God Israel under the old covenant. "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This particular designation of the people of God is also found in Leviticus 19:2, in Leviticus 20:26, in Deuteronomy 7:6 and in Isaiah 62:12. So it was very common to call God's people under the old covenant a holy nation.

Can't help but think as you remember that those Old Testament texts had Israel in mind how tragic it was that Israel as a holy nation lost out on being the unique people of God because of unbelief and thus forfeited the great privileges of belonging to God. And what was tragedy for Israel has become blessing for us as Paul notes in Romans when he talks about the setting aside of the Jew becoming the riches of the Gentile. God now has a new people. And this will be the new people until Israel finally turns in faith to the Messiah. We are then the new holy nation. Until the salvation of Israel we are the holy nation of God.

Now what does it mean? Well just that we have been set apart unto God. You say, "Is that for service?" Yes, but primarily, and this is what I want you to note, primarily it is for a relationship because service springs out of the relationship. God by His great grace has done what is inconceivable to me and to anyone who thinks about it. It is frankly inconceivable that God would bring sinners to Himself, that God would draw wicked vile sinners to Himself, taking them out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of His dear Son, out of communion with Satan and the demons into communion with Himself. But that is exactly what He has done. He has separated us from sin. He has separated us from Satan. He has separated us from the world, as it were. He has separated us unto Himself. Perhaps the word that theology has used most to describe this is sanctification. We are a sanctified people. That's what holy nation means. We have been separated from what is unholy and we have been devoted to God.

How did this happen? Go back to chapter 1 verse 1. It says that we are chosen, we are chosen...the end of verse 1, then verse 2...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, now follow, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. And that, beloved, expresses salvation. We were elect and then we became regenerate. God elected us, the Spirit set us apart to God in order that we might obey Jesus Christ and keep a covenant with Him, a covenant of obedience which is expressed in the statement "being sprinkled with blood."

So what we're talking about here is salvation as a setting apart work. When you were saved it wasn't just that your sins were forgiven, that's wonderful. It wasn't just that you were set apart from hell. You were literally brought into intimacy with God which is reflected in a new relationship and a new obedience. The Holy Spirit produces that work. That's why Peter says, as we saw also in chapter 1, that we have been born again, born of the Spirit, born again by the Word which the Spirit applies to our hearts.

So in the new birth there is a setting apart unto God. Though elect from the before the foundation of the world we are still a part of the mass of humanity unredeemed until in salvation the Holy Spirit separates us from the world and sin and death unto God. There are many Scriptures that point this out, I don't want to belabor the point or spin off into a theological discussion that's tangential, but I would want to mention in Acts 15 a couple of verses. Verse 7, "Peter stood up and said to them, Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us and He made no distinction between us and them...that is Jew and Gentile...cleansing their hearts by faith." That's what "to be sanctified" means, to be holy, cleansed of sin, set apart from sin, set apart from iniquity, set apart unto God.

Now, in Hebrews chapter 10, just one more verse that you can kind of file away in your mind, it says in verse 10 of Hebrews 10, "By this will...that is the will of God...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." So this sanctification is just another way to say salvation. Verse 14, "By one offering...that is the offering of Christ on the cross...He perfected for all time those who are sanctified." And then verse 15, "And the Holy Spirit bears witness with us."

So, sanctification is bound up in salvation. When you were saved you were set apart unto God. You became a holy nation by the initial work of salvation produced by the Holy Spirit in you. That's why 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." He became to us in our salvation the wisdom of God, righteousness, redemption and also sanctification.

Now, sanctification is more than just a state. It becomes a progressive life pattern. Now let me show you what it means very simply. First of all, when it says you were set apart unto God it means you were set apart to belong to God. It doesn't mean you never sinned again. It just meant you were set apart from belonging to sin, being in bondage to sin and the devil and death. You were set apart to God. In a sense that's your positional sanctification. Your position is you belong to God. But that only introduced you into a progressive sanctification whereby your life pattern changes. Now having been set apart unto God, you begin to live for God. And you continue to be more and more separated from the sin that was so much the dominant pattern of your life. That is why on the one hand Peter can say you're sanctified in chapter 1 verse 2, you are sanctified by the work of the Spirit, and yet in chapter 1 verse 16 he'll say you shall be holy.

You say, "Well now wait a minute, if holy means sanctified and you just said I have already been sanctified, then why would you say you shall be sanctified?" Because one is positional and the other is progressive and practical. In positional sanctification at my salvation I was taken out of the kingdom of darkness, placed in the kingdom of God's dear Son. I was taken out of death and put into life. I no longer am under my father the devil, but my Father the living God. I belong to Him. I am His possession. I have been separated from sin in terms of its penalty, in terms of its impact. That is my positional sanctification. But there's a progressive reality that I must continually live more and more in a holy separate way so that I bring out in the working out of my life the reality of my position. I used to say it's becoming what you are...it's becoming what you are.

In 1 Thessalonians we find also, just to enrich your thinking a little bit, in verse 3 of chapter 4, this is the will of God, your sanctification. Well what do you mean by that? I am...am not I already set apart unto God? Then he goes further, "That is that you abstain from sexual immorality." And we know he's talking about your practical sanctification. In fact, there are three kinds of sanctification...positional, practical and ultimate. The ultimate sanctification is when we're like Christ, totally set apart to Him. And that happens not in this life but in the life to come. There are many other Scriptures that we could look at but I think you understand. At salvation we have the privilege of being set apart unto God, we become His possession, sin no longer has dominion over us, Romans 6 says, we are no longer its slave, we are no longer in uncontrollable bondage to it, we are no longer the children of Satan, we have been set apart as God's holy people. And now we need to work out practically that position.

Just to reinforce that, in Acts chapter 20 there's a very interesting verse, verse 32, I believe it is, yes. "And now Paul says, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up...listen to this...and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." What do you mean, Paul? All those who were saved. The inheritance, the eternal inheritance belongs to all the saved. And in effect he says all the saved are the same as all the sanctified because being saved means to be set apart unto God.

In Acts chapter 26 the Apostle Paul in his defense before Agrippa in verse 18 is giving Agrippa a recitation of what the Lord said to him on the Damascus Road. In verse 18 it says, "That I am sending you to open their eyes...that is the eyes of the Gentiles...so they may turn from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me." And there you have sanctified as a parallel word to salvation. By faith you're sanctified, by faith you're saved, by faith you're forgiven, by faith you receive an inheritance and by faith you go from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God. It's all in that verse.

So we have a wonderful privilege. We are now a holy people. What does that mean? We've been set apart to God. We no longer are owned by Satan, we no longer are the victims in bondage to sin that

we once were. We have entered into a new relationship. We are now a people set apart unto God. That's the position. And progressively and practically we work toward living in the light of that holy identity, living up to our position, becoming what we are. You could simply say it this...we are a holy people called to be holy, we are a people set apart unto God, called to be set apart unto God. And why is sin such a disaster in our lives? Because it is so contrary to our union with Christ. It is so contrary to who we are as a holy people. It defies everything about our character for we have been set apart unto God.

Now what...what is this separation specifically in terms of how I view it practically in my own life? Well let me see if I can help you with that. First of all, what it's not. It is not the separation of a monk. We're not talking about if you're going to be practically sanctified you've got to isolate yourself from the world. That's outer, that doesn't do anything for the heart. That doesn't do anything for the heart. Remember the story of Abalard(?) and Eloise, the two lovers. And Abalard had, he was a monk, and he had fallen in love with Eloise and because he felt it was so wrong for him to be in love he castrated himself. That doesn't do any good. Now that might mean you can't consummate the relationship but that doesn't do a thing for what you're feeling in your heart. There are those who see separation as some kind of monkish externalism. It is not the separation of the monk and it is not the separation of the Pharisee either. The Pharisee is also outward, he is whitewashed. His heart is full of dead men's bones, is wretched, but he's painted the outside. That...he doesn't do this and he doesn't do that and he says no to this and he says no to that, and he circumscribes his life legalistically, that is not the separation we're talking about.

Nor is it the separation of the Stoic who believes it is a mortal sin to be happy and walks around with a dour look on his face, has a severe kind of seriousness, a sickening kind of piosity. That too is an outward thing.

You say, "What are you talking about?" Let me reduce it as simply as I can. Practical sanctification is simply this, cultivating an effective personal intimacy with Christ. When we say we are set apart unto Christ, we thereby say not only are we set apart unto Him positionally now that we are His children, but we are set apart unto Him personally in terms of intimacy...in terms of intimacy. It's what James said, "Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you." The heart of sanctification is that I cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm already joined to Him, 1 Corinthians 6 says, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." I've already been joined to Christ. That's why immorality is such a vile thing because it joins Christ to the harlot, as Paul says in that chapter.

But what we're really talking about when we talk about a holy nation is, first of all, positionally set apart. Secondly, intimately set apart. And you will never be a holy person in the fullest sense until you have cultivated a relationship of intimacy with the living Christ. That's the marvelous pursuit of sanctification. People always want to get the bottom line on everything. What does it mean to be sanctified? It means to pursue such intimacy with the living Christ that it controls your conduct. And I'll

tell you something right now, you will never control your conduct outside of a relationship of intimacy with the living Christ. I told you that a few weeks ago. We have a new sanctification in the world today, it's sanctification without Christ. It doesn't work. That's why so many people in ministry are falling, so many people falling into sin. Because they're trying to live out a Christian life and live out a holy identity without the living Christ, doing it by methods and means and quasi Christian psychology and introspection and selfimage and selfanalysis and all of that kind of stuff. There must be intimacy with Christ.

And so the pursuit of our holiness is the pursuit of an intimate relationship. That involves vulnerability and great exposure because as you draw intimate to Christ, He's going to see your life and your sin becomes obvious. But let me just encourage you that that is absolutely crucial, absolutely crucial.

Let me go on to point eight...there's much more I wanted to say there but I for the sake of time I want to go on. Point eight, not only do we have the privilege of being separated positionally and being in the process of being separated practically and looking forward to being separated unto Christ ultimately in glory, but we have another privilege and here Peter turns the kaleidoscope again. And this is what we see...possession by our Lord...possession by our Lord. Not only separation unto our Lord but possession by our Lord. And this follows certainly some of the same thought. Look at it again in verse 9, not only a chosen race, not only a royal priesthood, not only a holy nation but look at this, a people for God's own possession...a people for God's own possession. And again Peter is thinking of Exodus 19:5 where it says, "You shall be My own possession among all the people." He perhaps is thinking about Isaiah 43:21 where he says, "This people have I formed for Myself." He says the same thing in Deuteronomy 7:6, Deuteronomy 14:2, Deuteronomy 26:18, Malachi 3:17, many places. Israel of old was also a people possessed by the Lord.

Now let me give you just a little insight into the word "possessed." It means to acquire, to purchase, to acquire for a price. It's the same word, by the way, used in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 14 where it says, "The redemption of God's own possession." It is to purchase by a price. We are God's own possession because He paid the price. What was the price? Acts 20:28, "The church which He has purchased with His own...what?...blood....with His own blood." First Corinthians 6:20 says, "You are not your own, you are bought with a price...bought with a price," the price was the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Titus 2:14, "He gave Himself in order that He might redeem or purchase us from every lawless deed...listen...and purify for Himself a people for His own possession...His own possession." He acquired us. God by sovereign election chose us and by the sacrifice of Christ paid the price to buy us back. And so we belong to Him. I can't think of anything more wonderful, can you? Then to be the personal possession of the living Christ, God's personal possession.

Listen to John 10, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep but climbs up some other way is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep, to him the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear His voice and He calls His

own sheep by name and leads them out." They are His own sheep. Verse 14, "I am the good shepherd and I know My own and My own know Me."

I used to sit in seminary chapel and sing one of my very favorite hymns, "I am His and He is mine." From the earliest years of my seminary days I have always had a special love for the thought that I belong to Christ. Do you remember this old song? We've sung it through the years. "Jesus my Lord will love me forever, from Him no power of evil can sever. He gave His life to ransom my soul...what's the last line?...now I belong to Him. Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me, not for the years of time alone but for eternity." We are the possession of the Lord. We are His own. We belong to Him. What a privilege. What a glorious privilege!

And then there's a ninth. Peter turns the kaleidoscope one more time to show us a rearrangement of the jewels of salvation into yet another picture. Union with Christ, access to Him, security in the Lord, affection for the Lord, election by the Lord, dominion with the Lord, separation to the Lord, and possession by the Lord, and here's another one, illumination in our Lord...illumination in our Lord. Verse 9 says, follow it, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

What is darkness? Well you know that. It's the disastrous state of sin. It's the disastrous state of the unregenerate who are under the darkness of the prince of darkness, Satan himself. Darkness speaks of two things...ignorance and immorality. In other words, there is an intellectual darkness and there is a moral darkness. Intellectual darkness means you cannot see truth. Moral darkness means you cannot see righteousness. You do not know what is right and you cannot do what is right. Darkness.

But, says Peter, and I love this, "You have been called out of darkness." It is Him who has called you. Can I give you a note? Every time you see the word "called" in the epistles, it always indicates God's saving initiative. It is a technical term for the election of God put into action. It never is in the epistles a general call to the masses to salvation, it is always God's...as theology puts it...effectual call that ends in salvation...always. And so Peter is saying that the Lord has called you sovereignly out of darkness into His marvelous light.

By the way that saving call is certainly something on Peter's heart. Chapter 1, as we noted earlier, says we are chosen in verse 1. Look at verse 15, "The holy one who called you." And again the call to salvation is in view there.

Verse 21 of chapter 2, "For you have been called for this purpose." Again it's the effectual call unto salvation. Chapter 3 verse 9, "Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." Chapter 5 verse 10, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ with Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." And every time it's used it means an

effectual call unto salvation.

So Peter is saying in verse 9 that He called you and in that saving call He called you out of darkness into light...into not just light but His marvelous light. Very much like Colossians 1:13 which we have alluded to, and you know what it says. "He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."

This is another of our privileges, to have been called out of darkness into light. Now what does it mean that we're now in the light? It means that we have intellectual understanding and we have moral character. We not only know what's right, we can do what's right. There is both truth and righteousness, knowledge and obedience. For both of those are part of the light as both of those were absent in the darkness. We have been rescued from not knowing what God wants and not being able to do it. And this transition, I believe, is sometimes easy for us to forget. I guess the longer we're Christians, the less we think about what it was like before we knew Christ. But the transition is remarkable.

Let me tell you why it's remarkable. Follow this thought. It's remarkable not only because the unbeliever is in the darkness, but because the darkness is in the unbeliever. It's so pervasive. You are not only in the dark, you are a child of darkness. You are walking in the darkness. You are not only walking in the darkness, you are loving the darkness. Not only are you a child of darkness, in the darkness, and the darkness in you and loving the darkness, men love darkness because their deeds are evil, they want to hide in the darkness of their sin, not only is that true, but you don't even know there is light. That's why you can be an atheist for all the years of your life and give no thought to the light because the darkness comprehends not the light. And so the depth of darkness is profound. And God in His grace simply calls you out of darkness because of His own desire to do so. How rich we are and how we must go back to the reality that it has nothing to do with anything we have earned.

Peter turns the kaleidoscope one more time. And I promise you, there's so much more that can be said but I leave that to your own study. He turns the kaleidoscope one more time and we come to the compassion from our Lord...compassion from our Lord. Verse 10, I love this, "For you once were not a people but now you are THE people of God. You had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

You say, "Where did Peter get this?" It's quoted out of the prophet Hosea. Peter is really showing us his knowledge of the Old Testament. Hosea 1:6, "The wife of Hosea conceived and gave birth to a daughter and the Lord said to him, name her Lo ruhamah: for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel; that I should ever forgive them. But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen. When she had weaned Loruhamah she conceived and gave birth to a son and the Lord said, Name him Loammi: for you are not My people and I am not Your God. Yet the number of the

sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered and it will come about that in the place where it is said to them, You are not My people, it will be said to them, You are the sons of the living God."

He reaches back and captures those thoughts out of Hosea chapter 1 where God says you are not a people but you will be a people. There will be a time when you will not receive mercy and then a time when you will receive mercy. But when brought into the New Testament that which was said of Israel of old is here applied to the Gentiles. You can compare Romans chapter 9, just very briefly, verse 15, "For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Verse 23 down through 26, the same thing, he says in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people My people and her who was not My beloved, beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, there they shall be called sons of the living God." And that comes out of Hosea chapter 2 which I didn't take the time to read, verse 23.

So, Peter reaches back and captures that same text which Paul uses in Romans 9. And in the case of Peter as in the case of Paul, it surely here refers to the church who were once not a people but now are the people of God. And particularly the Gentiles were the no people who now are the people of God. By the way, this is an interesting thing because it indicates to us that Peter is not writing particularly and exclusively to Jews in this epistle but encompasses the church which involves Gentiles as well.

Now, God says you are not My people, you'll become My people. And what is the means? This is the point I want you to note. The means is mercy. Back to verse 10, "You were not a people, you are the people." Why? "You had not received mercy, now you've received mercy." Mercy is compassion, beloved. Mercy is compassion. So we say that one of our spiritual privileges is compassion from our Lord. He has shown us mercy. He has shown us compassion. Israel had become a no people through sin and apostasy. And a no people, the Gentiles, became God's people through mercy...through mercy.

I wish I could say much about this thought of mercy. It's so rich. We could spend weeks just studying the mercy of God. But let me just apply it in this context. Just what is mercy? Basically pity, basically compassion. The Old Testament could substitute the word "loving kindness" from that familiar Hebrew word checed. It is God's...it is God's withholding from us the just punishment of our sin, that's the idea. It is God's withholding from us the just punishment of our sin.

There are two kinds of mercy. We could call one general mercy...general mercy. What do you mean by that? Well it's seen in creation. It's seen in God's providence to the widest range of human beings. And it shows us His patient pity, His forebearing compassion to sinners because, you see, God has every right to just burn sinners up, just consume them immediately those that don't know Him, those that reject Him, those that hate Him. But listen to what it says in Lamentations 3:22, "The Lord's living

kindness indeed never cease for His compassions never fail." It's not really identifying any particular group of people. He is just compassionate. In the Psalms, I think it's Psalm 145 right toward the end and verse 9, "The Lord is good to all His mercies are over all His works." There's just a general mercy that means that people aren't burned up, they aren't consumed. What it means is that He alleviates the present full potential disaster of sin, and maybe that's the best way to say it. God mercifully eliminates the present earthly full potential disaster of sin. That's general mercy which comes upon all people.

Isaiah 27:11, it says, "When its limbs are dry they are broken off. Women come and make a fire with them for they are not a people of discernment." And he's talking here about people who aren't discerning and yet he says, "They are not a people of discernment therefore their maker will not have compassion on them and their creator will not be gracious to them." And what Isaiah is saying is there comes a time when the mercy of God runs out and the compassion of God runs out and the full potential of sin is felt.

But we're talking here not about general mercy but let's call it special mercy, that is mercy on the elect. That is a unique mercy. Now listen very carefully to what I say. It is equally undeserving for we are sinners like the rest. Listen to this. For some people God is generally merciful in this life by alleviating the present full potential disaster of sin. For other people He alleviates forever the potential disaster of sin. Those are the elect who receive not only the general mercy in this life but the special mercy in the life to come. He bestows compassion on the victims of sin by forgiving their sin. In the case of the unregenerate, He just withholds judgment until the future. In the case of the elect, He forgives the sin and eliminates the judgment.

You say, "Why?" Because He wanted to. "Why did He want to?" Because He's a God of love. "Why did He choose us?" I don't know...I don't know. But who is a pardoning God like You, says Micah, and who is so merciful?

You say, "Why did God choose us?" Romans 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." That's all He says. And you say, "But...but...but.." And He says, "Is the pot going to say to the potter, Why did you do that?" Listen to what I say. It is not the wretchedness of the sinner that causes God to show mercy. Did you hear that? God is not sitting in heaven saying, "Oh, I feel so sorry for all the sinners. And I'm so emotionally distraught about their sin that I'm going to be merciful to them." God does not show mercy out of a certain feeling for the wretchedness of man because if that were true then God would have to be merciful to...what?...to all of them. God is not influenced by the misery of sinners or He would save them all because they are all miserable. That's not the compelling issue.

Secondly, it is not because some of us sinners are more worthy of mercy than others of us. None of us are worthy of it, right? And if we were it wouldn't be mercy because mercy is holding back the just punishment which we deserve. And all our righteousness is as filthy rags. And the term that Isaiah

used there is a gross term.

Furthermore, God is not merciful to some of us because Christ made it possible for Him to be merciful. You hear people say, "Now that Christ has died it is possible for God to be merciful and He wants to pour out that mercy because of what Christ has done." If that were true since Christ died for all and mercy would be available for all, then God would save all. No it is not the wretchedness of the sinner that compels God to show mercy, it is not that some sinners are more worthy of mercy than others. It is not simply that because of the work of Christ God can be merciful. None of those make sense.

You say, "Well why did God choose to be merciful?" Because He chose to be merciful. That's all I know. We have been chosen by His uninfluenced sovereign love before the world began. A. W. Pink wrote, "Mercy arises solely from God's imperial pleasure." Does that blow some of your fuses? It shouldn't, but it ought to escalate your sense of being a privileged person. Are we blessed, folks? Are we blessed? Are we blessed!

Can we say with the psalmist in Psalm 57:10, "Thy mercies great unto the heavens?" Can we say, "Great is His mercy to them that fear Him?" Certainly we can. It is mercy that saves us. It is mercy that grants to us an eternal inheritance. That's why 2 Corinthians 1:3 calls God the Father of mercies. Someone wrote, "When all Thy mercies, O my God, my soul arising surveys, transported with the view I'm lost in wonder, love and praise." Mercy...a spiritual privilege beyond description...beyond description. He saved us, Titus 3:5, "Not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy." What a spiritual privilege. And so the psalmist says in Psalm 136 verse 1, "O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy endures...how long?...forever." Psalm 59:16, "I will sing aloud of the mercy of God."

Then one final spiritual privilege. Let's call it proclamation of our Lord. Peter turns the kaleidoscope one more time...proclamation of our Lord. And for this one we go back to verse 9. What's the purpose of all of this? Why are we so privileged? Why in the world are we so privileged? Why would the Lord do all of this for us? Union with Him, access to Him, security in Him, affection for Him, election by Him, dominion with Him, separation to Him, possession by Him, illumination from Him, compassion from Him...why? In order that we might engage in proclamation of Him, verse 9, "That you may proclaim His excellencies." You see it? That's it. And that too is a privilege, isn't it? Can you think of a higher privilege than to be the ambassador of the living God?

The word "proclaim" is only used here. It's a very very unusual word, it appears no where else in the Greek language. This particular word...no where else in the entire Bible. It means to advertise. It means to publish. It means to tell out. And it has the force of telling something otherwise unknown. What do excellencies mean? It's a great word. Literally in the Greek it means the ability to do heroic deeds. And we now have the privilege of telling what the world will otherwise not know that God can

do heroic things. He has the ability to do mighty and powerful acts. It's not so much referring excellencies, it's not so much referring to attributes, not so much referring to intrinsic qualities, as powerful deeds, heroic deeds. Oh my how privileged we are, aren't we? We are ambassadors for the one who has given us this privilege.

I don't know anybody in this place who wouldn't feel it was an honor if they were chosen to be an ambassador of the President of the United States, to represent his powers and his abilities. But to be chosen to be an ambassador of the living God who has the ability to do heroic deeds on the scale of miraculous, what a privilege. And so instead of dropping your head when you have an opportunity to speak about who you represent, you might well lift your head and say, "I have the privilege of being an announcer of the mighty heroic deeds of the living God who has called me into His service."

I remember after Otis Chandler who owns and operates the L.A. Times along with a number of papers came and had lunch with me, he had been attending our church for a while. And he sat down, he said, "You have a lot of clout, you have a lot of influence, a lot of people listen to you." He said, "Why don't you give your opinion on all the issues in the world?" Of course he's into that, he owns television stations and newspapers and...And I said, "Otis," I said, "I appreciate your confidence in my opinion but do you really think the world needs another guy's opinion?" And he kind of laughed. And I said, "Really, what in the world does the world need from me about my view?" He said, "Well, how do you see yourself then, what's your role?" Very simple. I have been called to speak the opinion of God. "Oh," he said, "I never heard anyone say that." I said, "I'm here just to tell everybody what God says and to proclaim Him." What a tremendous privilege. What a tremendous privilege.

We are ambassadors for Christ, 2 Corinthians 5. We have been given the Holy Spirit and now we are witnesses unto Him. What a spiritual privilege. Well, what an image we have seen in each of these eleven things. Don't leave me. Give me five minutes and I'm going to wrap this up in a way that will thrill your heart. Will you listen to this?

Do you know why we have these privileges? You know why we have them? Only one reason, because we're in Christ. Now follow my thought. Because we're in Christ. It's only because we're in Christ that we have these. Let me go back over them quickly.

We are in union with God because we are in Christ and Christ is one with God. Right? We have access to the Father and access into His glorious presence because we have access through Christ. We are secure in our relationship to God because we are in Christ and He is secure in His relationship to God because of the trinity. Our security is in Him. Our access is in Him. Our union is in Him. We have affection for the Lord, we love God, we feel the fullness of that affection because His love has been shed abroad in our hearts and we love because we've first been loved in Christ. The only reason we are elected because we are elect in Him, the Bible says. We are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. It's only in Him that we become the chosen. And as far as

dominion goes, our dominion is because we reign with Him. And separation, a holy nation, we are only holy because we are in Him. The possession of God, we are only the possession of God because we are in Christ who is God's own Son. We are only illuminated, we are only in the light because we are in Him who is the light. And we have compassion from God only because Jesus Christ died for us and because of that He can love us in Christ and give us mercy. And finally, we can only proclaim His excellencies when it is the power of Christ in us proclaiming through us, right? Acts 1, you can't be a witness until the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

So we're right back to Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ...in Christ." Hey, we are a motley bunch of erstwhile sinners who deserve eternal damnation but because we are in Christ we have all these spiritual privileges. Are you grateful? You say, amen? Amen. Let's pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, we do consider You the fairest of ten thousand. We thank You for what You've done and what we have become because of You. All the spiritual privileges that are ours overwhelm us. Help us to be faithful, to live a life of gratitude. I pray for every person here tonight, Lord, that we might...we might be overwhelmed with thanksgiving, who have been rescued from eternal hell, who have been given such privilege, we who are not the fairest, not the fairest by any stretch, we who are ugly in our sins have been brought into union with the fairest Lord Jesus strictly because of Your grace and mercy. O Lord God, how thankful we are and may we live out that gratitude in Jesus' name. Amen.

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