

## A PEOPLE OF HIS OWN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Carlton Kenney: **Acts 15:14** describes what the Church is, “a people taken out for His name.” (p. 1, *The Church Which Is His Body*)

PBS show “Call the Midwife” – season finale, nuns talking about former custom of their order, when taking vows, initiates wear a wedding dress, as if being “married” to Christ.

**Titus 2:11-14** talks about the purpose of God’s saving grace, that Jesus “*gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people all His own who are eager to do good works,*” (Revised Berkley Version); or, “*that He might set us free from every lawlessness...a people of His own private possession, zealous of good works,*” (Wuest).

**Ephesians 2:10** tells us that we were “*created in Christ for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” It’s exciting to think that God has a purpose or destiny for us, a path of good works prepared for us to walk in, a life of meaning and fruitfulness that leads to His glory. However, one big hindrance to walking in that path is we don’t understand God’s ways, we need to be enlightened.

“*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts,*” **Isaiah 55:8,9**. Our thinking needs to be adjusted!

Think how often we get the cart before the horse in our thinking. For instance, we understand we are sinners because we sin. It sounds logical. And according to this logic, the solution is simple: stop sinning. Change your behaviors.

But the truth is, we sin because we are *sinners!* Changing our behavior won’t change *what* we are. That lion in the cage may act tame for the moment, but it’s still a lion! A more fundamental change is required, at the root level of our being; a change of nature and identity, who and what we are. And thus it is that we must be born again, receive a new nature from the Spirit, become a new creation of God.

If you are a Christian, you are no longer a “sinner,” but a “saint.” You have been set apart to God by receiving a new heart and spirit that is alive with His eternal life. For the moment, your new life is stuck with this old body, and this old body can still sin, and you need to control it, discipline it, and make it a living sacrifice to the will of God. But even if your behavior is sinful on occasion, your identity still remains a “saint,” saved by the grace of God, and called to walk in the path of good works.

In **Titus 2:11-14**, we see that the grace of God brings salvation. We're so used to thinking that our works must earn salvation! (admit it!) But no, it's purely grace, and we receive it as a gift, by faith. Then when salvation comes, it *teaches* us to deny ungodliness and lust, to live soberly and righteously. We see then, righteous living is the *outcome* of grace working in our lives. We don't live righteously to attain grace, but we *receive* grace to live righteously!

Jesus GAVE Himself for us. We are always talking about giving our lives to the Lord, committing ourselves to Him. But the truth is, we don't need more commitment... we need more *receiving* of the life Jesus gave for us. We think the better we perform, the more valuable we are to the Lord. But no, nothing we can say or do makes us of any value. Value is *given* to us on the basis of what Christ did for us, purely out of love. He gave Himself, His life, His value, for us... so now we are as precious to God as His only begotten Son, which is surely far more value than we could ever acquire by virtue of our works, devotions, or sacrifices.

When we talk about giving our lives to the Lord, there's a fundamental error in our thinking. Our terminology betrays us, when we say our lives or my life. **1 Cor. 6:19,20** tells us in the plainest terms, there is no such thing. You are not the owner of your life, God is. He has all the rights to your life – copyrights, movie rights, custody rights, parental rights, right-of-way, the right to tell you what's what and how high to jump.

**Titus 2:14** says He gave Himself to redeem us and purify us – for what? So we're not worthless and stinky anymore? More than that, so that we can be His own special people. A people of His own private possession. His own, and no one else's! Just think, the Creator of the universe, who has all the marvelous things of space and time to occupy Himself, has set His affection on you, and wants you to be His very own, in a very special way.

**Titus 3:4-7** expands on this understanding of the gospel: *“the kindness and love of God toward man appeared...”* It was His initiative, not something we won or extracted from Him by our good works. *“God our Savior”* tells us something foundational about our relationship to Him: we need saving! We were drowning, helpless in sin, definitely NOT standing on our own merits. And He saved us, not from any obligation, but purely because He is so good, loving, and kind – *“according to His mercy,”* something the scriptures tell us God is exceedingly RICH in.

Notice again, there is nothing of our merit or accomplishment here, it is all *of* Him, all *about* Him. He saved us in accordance with His boundless mercy and grace, HALLELUJAH! We surely needed it.

And here is a note on the mechanics of *how* He saved us: *“through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...”*

Be careful when you consider these phrases, not to get the cart before the horse! Regeneration is not the result of washing, the Holy Spirit is not the result of renewing. Otherwise you have a religious duty to be washing yourself all the time, so that you can be successfully regenerated; you have to always seek renewing experiences so that you can get more of the Holy Spirit. (Does that sound familiar?)

Rather, it is regeneration, the new birth, that does the washing. (Regeneration – Gk. *paliggenesia* = new birth, reproduction, renewal, re-creation, renovation) New birth is a one-time event. As Jesus said to Peter when washing his feet, *“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean...”* **John 13:10**, indicating we don't need to be converted over and over again, or go through endless repetitive religious rituals to make ourselves acceptable to God or a better Christian or whatever.

It is the Holy Spirit who does the renewing. (Renewal – Gk. *anakainosis* = a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better. Root ideas include being changed into a new kind of life, of a new kind, unprecedented, unheard of!) Rather than trying to get closer to God or more of the Spirit by engaging in various renewal exercises (think spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation), the key is simply yielding to the Spirit by faith, trusting and allowing Him to do the renewing His way.

Being saved, born again, regenerated with a new life, makes us a new creation of God. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new,”* **2nd Cor. 5:17**. It's not just the record of our sins that is erased, but the life of sin is done away with, removed from us *“as far as the East is from the West!”* **Ps. 103:12**. We have received a new heart and a new spirit, which are eager to do God's will, brought to us by His own Spirit, Who comes to live in us and becomes the Source of daily, continual renewal. He gives us both the willing desire and the power to do God's will, which we could not and would not do before.

We are not saved by the effort of our will, the goodness of our works, or the sincerity of our spirituality. We are saved by being born again with a new spiritual life inside of us, and this is something God causes to happen, it originates with Him before we ever exhibit any will or desire to change. We don't give our life to Him, except for Him to wash it away! We receive His life, receive Him by faith, and He comes to live His life in us and through us (see **Gal. 2:20**).

This is His mercy. The Holy Spirit is poured out on us abundantly. This is one of those times where two superlative words are put together in the Greek to indicate *how much more* and *over-and-above* God is, GUSHING out His fabulous wealth, fulness, and plenty of the Holy Spirit. Remember how Jesus said *rivers* of living water would flow out of us when we receive the Holy Spirit!

More than one commentator has noted, if there is a shortage of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the lack is not on His side. He is a fountain, a river, an ocean, a tsunami! The River hasn't dried up, but somehow our connection, our pipes and channels are clogged, our faith is lacking.

"Renewal" means changed into a new kind of life. The true Christian life is not a "reformed" life in the sense of "I changed my ways, so I'm living a new life compared to my old habits and patterns."

It is a re-NEWED life, made brand new... a *renovated* life, in the sense of that show, "Extreme Home Makeover," where they would come in and rather than simply remodeling your own home with fresh decor and an addition or two, they bulldozed it down to the ground and removed it entirely, and built something entirely new, different, bigger and better!

If you want to merely remodel your life, any religion, philosophy, or self-help program will serve the purpose.

If you want to get into the kingdom of God, Jesus said you must be born again (**John 3:3-8**). Made completely new. And for that, He only is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And that life is freely available to all who believe, simply ask and receive. Jesus gave Himself so that you would be His very own people. Have you understood yourself on those terms, and offered yourself as a bride to her husband: "*yes, Lord, I do... I am Yours, take me for Your own, I will go wherever You lead and do whatever You want.*"

The ultimate goal of God's grace is not just to possess us like things, but to become His *people* – His friends, co-workers, family, "*heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*" Heirs are the ones who inherit everything! God's will is for us to inherit His kingdom – we get it all! And we'll have eternity to explore and enjoy it. We mostly think in terms of the present-day, material, sensual world... but there really is something much better coming. Glorious, perfect, awesome beyond description, far beyond anything we can presently comprehend...

He wants us for His own, and the only question is, are we willing to go there?