

# Who are we?

Paul uses three words to describe God's people: *chosen*, *holy* and *beloved* (*Colossians 3.12*). Each is a source of great comfort.

## **Chosen**

To know you are *chosen* helps you see that your eternal well-being is grounded in God's purposes. It is not dependent upon you, your desires or your efforts. God's plan is to have a people who are his own. Paul says this plan was devised by God 'before the foundation of the world' (*Ephesians 1.4*). What God purposes he brings to pass. His people then are secure.

## **Holy**

The idea of security emerges again when we consider the second term used by the apostle. The word *holy* refers, first, to the fact that God's people are set apart from the rest of mankind. There are two types of people in the world. Those who have been changed by God and those who have not. Christians are people whom God has made new.

By nature we are all inclined to rebel. This rebellious inclination is something we cannot control or conquer. We must be changed and empowered by God if we would enjoy victory over it. That is why Jesus told a leading Jew, Nicodemus, we 'must be born from above' if we are to see the kingdom of heaven (*John 3.1ff*).

When God visits an individual with regenerating power that person is made new and is, from that moment, set aside as belonging to God. He is a holy person - a set-apart-one.

And from that moment a Christian begins to grow holy as God is holy (*Leviticus 11.44; 1 Peter 1.16*). Thus he is a person who is holy (set apart) and, at the same time, he is a person

who spends his life growing holy (that is, more like God).

### **Beloved**

The third word also gives assurance to a believer. To know you are *beloved* reassures you that God loves you. Indeed his promise is that he will never ceasing loving his people. He watches over them, and sees them as 'the apple of his eye.'

We must go a step further. What are God's chosen, holy and beloved ones called to do?

### **Serve**

A key word in the Bible is *serve*. That is what the people of Israel knew they were freed from slavery in Egypt to do (*Exodus 23.25; Deuteronomy 6.13*). That was what Malachi informed the people of God in his day they were to do (*Malachi 3.18*). And that is what the Lord Jesus reminds us we are to do (*Matthew 6.24*).

How are we to serve? Edmund Clowney provides a helpful summary. The Church, he writes, "is called to serve God in three ways." First, we are "to serve him directly in *worship*." Secondly, the church is "to serve the saints in *nurture*" - he means God's people are to help each other grow

in knowing Christ and his word. And thirdly, the church is "to serve the world in *witness*" (E Clowney, *The Church*, p117).

We shall confine ourselves to the third area of service, namely *witness* to the world.

### **Witness**

How are we to understand this aspect of our service?

There is universal agreement that it includes preaching the word of God. The peoples of the world need to hear the gospel. They need to hear it for a number of reasons.

One is that *it is the answer to mankind's condition*. It is only through knowing God, his will, and his provision for us in Christ, that we can find a meaning and purpose in life that makes sense of life and satisfies the deepest longings of mankind.

Secondly, - and this point is related to the first - *all people are under an obligation to submit all their thinking to the revealed will of their Creator*. We know that by nature we suppress our awareness of God and our accountability to him (*Romans 1 & 2*).

That however does not negate our duty to love and serve him with all our being. On the contrary it illustrates something of the nature of our rebellion against him.

God has made us to glorify and enjoy him for ever. We will never discover what that means or involves in the recesses of our hearts or the philosophical, political, religious or social musings of men. It is only to be found in the record of what God has made known to us. That definitive record is the Bible. And that is the message that the Church is charged to make known. God's people are to be witnesses to the peoples of the world. They are to inform people of who he is, what he promises, what he has done, and what he will yet do.

Thirdly, the world needs to hear the gospel of God because *mankind is under another obligation* which is of utmost importance. God has appointed Jesus Christ as Lord over all. Though unseen in heaven, he rules over all to the glory of the Father and for the good of his Church he purchased with his blood. All people are not just to hear what God has done in Christ. They are

commanded to embrace his Son lest they perish (*Psalms 2.11*). The apostle Paul makes the same point when he speaks of the need for us all "to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*2 Thessalonians 1.8*).

The importance of preaching the word of God should not therefore be demeaned. Moreover, we should note there are different ways of understanding the term preach. We tend to think first of a teaching elder heralding forth and explaining the word. But we should not forget the whole Church - people *and* elders - is called to make Christ known. And so we turn to another aspect of witness.

### ***Godly living***

The people of God are called to live righteous and godly lives in the world. They are called to engage in acts of practical love. What does it mean in practical terms?

We can think of three spheres in which believers are active - the family, Church, and society. In each we are to demonstrate the values and virtues of the kingdom of God.

Thus in the home a husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the

Church; a wife is to support and work with her husband; children are to heed the godly discipline and nurture provide by their parents; and parents are not to exasperate their children.

In the Church we are to encourage each other to love and good works. We are to care for each other, pray for each other, and show acts of kindness to each other. And, in the power of the Spirit, we are to glorify God together in times of corporate worship.

What are we to do in the world? Our witness in the world is frequently referred to as *mission*. Traditionally the term has been understood to entail all that we have said above. In particular the focus has been on preaching first and then acts of love.

Today there is a new emphasis. The mission of the Church we are told is twofold. It is (1) to proclaim the gospel and (2) to do justice. The doing of justice is understood by many as changing the world. Christians are to engage in cultural and social and transformation.

Certainly Christians want to see the world transformed. They want to see

individuals changed. They also want to see justice in the world. This is a theme we find in the prophets. Micah may be used to illustrate the point. He reminds us God calls us to do justice and to love kindness (*Micah 6.8*).

But what does it mean to do justice in the world? How is the word to be defined? These are very important questions. If we do not allow ourselves to be guided and ruled by Scripture we will find ourselves following the hunches we have or the agenda set by the world. - an agenda which is becoming more aggressively secular.

A very serious question mark needs to be raised over the equalities agenda of many today. As we see people drift away from and jettison the way of life taught in the Bible, we see many ungodly things justified on the ground of choice or equality.

What the world defines as just or justice is not necessarily how the Bible sees it. The Church then needs to proceed with care.