

“A Peculiar People: (Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9)

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A Peculiar People?

Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9

“ . . . purify unto himself a peculiar people” (Titus 2:14; KJV); “ . . . a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9; KJV).

Have you ever listened to a teacher or preacher stress the need for the Christian to be a “peculiar” person in a sinful world? The speaker may urge us to not be conformed to the world in thought, speech, and behavior which is a very valid admonishment (cf. Romans 12:1-2). In order to buttress his admonition, the teacher may quote Titus 2:14 from the King James Version, stating that Christ gave Himself to redeem us from sin and “purify unto himself a *peculiar* people, zealous of good works.” Before me on the desk is an article entitled “Peculiar People” taken from a monthly paper entitled *The Light*. Yet many others have made the same mistake over the years.

The term, “peculiar,” in the common language of today means, “strange; queer; odd,” or it can also mean, “uncommon; unusual,” or even, “distinctive in nature or character from others” (*Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*). Did Jesus die to make us “strange” or “queer” or “odd”? Definitely not. In a sense, He did die to make us uncommon or different from those in

the world around us and He did die to give us a distinctive character from others. All of this may be gleaned from many passages of Scripture (cf. Gal. 1:4; 1 John 2:15-17; James 1:27; 4:4).

But this is *not* what Titus 2:14 is saying. The Greek term in question is *periousios*, which means “chosen, especial” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*). This is why the NASB renders the line, “a people for His own possession,” and the NIV has, “a people that are his very own.” W.E. Vine notes, “The word ‘peculiar’ has come to have a different meaning from its original idea (it is derived from the Latin *peculium*, the share of booty allotted to a captain)” (*The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, p. 168).

Ralph Earle adds, “There is perhaps no word in the KJV that is more misleading today than the term ‘peculiar.’ That English term now means ‘odd’ or ‘eccentric.’ The Greek word has nothing to do with such a caricature of Christianity. . . . When we say today that a certain person is ‘peculiar,’ we mean that he is queer, that he’s an oddball. It doesn’t bring any glory to God or the church when we try to be odd in order to prove that we are holy” (*Word Meanings in the New Testament*). He notes that Cremer says the term denotes “more than a mere possession” but rather means “a treasure.” The same scholar says, “Accordingly *periousios* is what constitutes a costly possession, a specially chosen good, that which is a costly possession.” Cremer is right. We are the costly possession of the Lord Jesus Christ for He was willing to pour out His life blood on our behalf!

What about 1 Peter 2:9? The KJV says, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *a peculiar people*.” Is it true that we are a “peculiar” people? Not in the sense that this word is used today. The term is from the Greek *peripoiesis*, meaning, “possessing, possession, property” (Arndt and Gingrich), or “an obtaining, an acquisition” (W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*). Accordingly, the NASB renders the phrase, “a people for God’s own possession,” and the NIV has, “a people belonging to God.” We are a “possessed” people and not a “peculiar” people—in the sense that some people use the verse. Earle observes that we are “precious” rather than “peculiar”! While we definitely are to be different from the world because of our commitment to Jesus and His way of life, we are not to be “odd” or “queer” (a term itself with questionable connotations!).

Let us learn a lesson from this matter. Let us refuse to be so bound to an ancient translation that we overlook the Spirit-inspired meaning of terms and tenaciously cling to a meaning that the Holy Spirit did not have in mind when the Scriptures were written. We must be bound to the Word of God and not to a fallible translation or archaic rendition.

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