

‘Privileged but responsible’ (2)

We are continuing our sermon series of Peter’s letters. The last time we were together Peter reminded us that as Christians we need to believe that this world is not our home and our lives need to reflect that we don’t belong to this world. Because as Christians our final destination is heaven and even though we live here on Earth as strangers our citizenship is heaven and we need to live like heaven people. Today Peter is going to remind us that we’re not Christians by chance or by some random selection but because we are a part of God’s plan. But before we get into the sermon today let me share with you three short thoughts I got from a book.

When I was a child, I was so fat that in the school Nativity play I was the one chosen to play Bethlehem. Among the graffiti on the wall of a University building was these words: "If God had wanted us to use the metric system, he would have chosen ten disciples." A jury consists of twelve persons chosen to decide who has the better lawyer.

I remember when I was a child I very rarely got chosen for anything. I was never quite good enough for the school football team so I spent most of the time on the bench. When it came to learning new dances at school and people had to choose their partners to dance with, I was always left to the end. When we played games of any sort and you had to split into teams I was always the last one to be chosen.

But there were also other times when I was chosen. If we played hide and seek I was always the one who had to do the finding. If someone wanted sweets from the shop I was always the one who had to run to the shop and use my own money to buy everyone sweets.

Now I don’t know about you but I believe that being chosen to do something is a great honour. Especially when it is God who is doing the choosing. 1 Peter 1:2 “You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father and were made a holy people by his Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be purified by his blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure”.

Now I know that some translations use the word **elect**, but the word **elect** simply means **chosen**. And it’s the same word which Peter uses in 1 Peter 2:9+10 “But you are the chosen race, the King’s priests, the holy nation, God’s own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light. At one time you were not God’s people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God’s mercy, but now you have received his mercy.”

What a wonderful honour it is to know that God chose you **isn’t it?** You see loved ones you and I are a part of God’s predetermined plan but just because He predetermined it doesn’t mean that we don’t have a choice to say ‘**No thanks God**’, we have a choice. But this plan which was already arranged even before the Earth begun.

The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:4+5 “Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children---this was his pleasure and purpose.”

So the plan was in place before the world begun and God chose us so that we would be holy and without blame and to make us His children through adoption. And as we His children say “**thank you**”, God says, ‘**it’s my pleasure.**’ Now if God has done all those wonderful things for us by choosing us then surely common sense tells us that He chose us for a purpose.

Listen church, **Peter Crouch** didn’t get chosen to play for **England** just for the sake of it. He was chosen for a purpose and that purpose is to score goals. And in much the same way God chose us for a purpose. Ephesians 2:10 “**God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do**”.

God says you were chosen to live a life of good deeds. That was His goal for you since the beginning of time. And loved ones His goal should be our goal not just as individuals but also His church. And if you get anything from this sermon this morning it’s this, you have been chosen by God and that alone should tell us just how special we are to God as His children. And so not only are we special enough for God to chose us, were special enough to be chosen to be holy.

1 Peter 1:2 “You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father and were made a holy people by his Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be purified by his blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure”. Peter says that we become God's chosen people through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Now again some translations use the word ‘**sanctification**’ which basically means ‘**set apart**’. And this is the process by which we are “**set apart**” for God's purpose and is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

You see loved ones one of the many jobs of the Holy Spirit is do just that, to set us apart from the world to do God's purpose. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 “We must thank God at all times for you, friends, you whom the Lord loves. For God chose you as the first to be saved by the Spirit's power to make you his holy people and by your faith in the truth”.

Now there is a lot of confusion in the religious world about how the Spirit sanctifies a person, but if we allow the Bible to speak, we will find the simple answer within the Bible. And if anyone knows what the Spirit means, it's the Spirit Himself; after all He was the One who wrote the Scriptures in the first place. The Holy Spirit sanctifies simply through the Word of God, which we call the Bible.

John 16:12+13 “When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God; he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come”. The Spirit says that He would reveal the Word to the apostles. John 17:17 “Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth”.

The Spirit says that through this revealed Word, we are “**sanctified**” **set apart**. In other words when people obey the Word of God which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, they become “**chosen to salvation**.” So simply put the Holy Spirit's work is the Divine side of conversion, as the Spirit has revealed the Word and convicts men of sin through it.

That's what He does but in return He wants something. This is what we might call our side of the deal, the human side of conversion, and that is simply to believe the Word of God. 2 Thessalonians 2:13+14 “We must thank God at all times for you, friends, you whom the Lord loves. For God chose you as the first to be saved by the Spirit's power to make you his holy people and by your faith in the truth. God called you to this through the Good News we preached to you; he called you to possess your share of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

So loved ones if we believe the Bible and believe we have been “**set apart**” by belief in the truth. If we take the Holy Spirit at His word and truly believe that we are God's chosen people who are now a part of His eternal plan. If we feel truly privileged to know all this then surely we should know that such privileges come with certain responsibilities.

You see loved ones my children enjoy the privileges of living with me. They enjoy good food, being clothed, having a bed to sleep in and a roof over their heads. Now they may not see this as a privilege but compared to some children who live in the UK they are very privileged. But all these privileges don't come unconditionally; I love them unconditionally but there are terms and conditions for living in my home. If they want to continue to live with me, they need to help around the house, keep their bedrooms clean and tidy, put their clothes away etc. In other words, I provide the privilege but for them to enjoy the privileges which come from living with me they need to be obedient to my words.

Why is it we understand that way so much easier than we do when it comes to God? You see God loves all people unconditionally, Romans 5:6 “For at just the right time, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. Now that's God loving all people unconditionally, but if we want receive salvation and want to continue to live in His house, that's where the terms and conditions come in. He chose, saved us and set us apart to do good works, and yet we still struggle with the concept of obedience.

Well loved ones, if we want to continue to enjoy God's salvation and continue to enjoy living in God's house, we need to be obedient to His words, His terms and conditions. We saw earlier in Ephesians 2:10 that it was part of God's plan before time began that the people of God would “**walk in good deeds**.”

Titus 2:11-14 “For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of all people. That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, as we wait for the blessed Day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will appear. He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good”.

Now remember we cannot and do not earn salvation by doing good deeds but we do our good deeds because we already have salvation in Christ Jesus. I think one reason we struggle with the concept of obedience is because we still have rebellion in our hearts at times.

2 guys were walking their dogs, one had a collie, and the other had a cheewowa, they walked down the street to a new restaurant that they thought they might try out. But when they got there, there was a sign that said, "No pets allowed." They looked at one another and thought we've walked all this way for nothing. One them said, "No we haven't", he reached into his pocket and got out a pair of sunglasses and put them on, and said to his friend, "Watch this!" He walked in with his collie and pretended to be blind, and the owner said, "Come on in sir", read him the menu and served him his meal. The other guy with the cheewowa thought, "Well, that ought to work for me". So he put on his sunglasses and walked into the restaurant. The owner said, "Hey, no pets allowed," "Outside". The man said, "Sir, this is my Seeing Eye dog". And the owner laughed and said, "A cheewowa" And the guy just said, "They gave me a cheewowa!"

My kids are always looking for a way around the rules, we as adults are always looking for ways to get around any rule. And everyone is always looking for ways around God's rules. That's why some people say, 'hey just say a little prayer and you will be a Christian'. 'Hey just say sorry to God and then you will be saved always no matter what you do next in life.' 'Hey just go to church every week, doesn't matter which church just as long as you go to one, you will be fine'. 'Hey that's great that you believe in Jesus, you don't need to bother about being baptised, that's not important'.

No wonder people get upset with us for preaching obedience. You see loved ones we get upset because all of us don't like being told what to do. But we cannot and must not ignore the very words of Jesus Himself. We cannot and must not ignore the terms and conditions of Jesus if we want to continue to live with Him. **Matthew 28:18-20** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, as you go, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey (what?) all that I have commanded you".

And if talking about obedience is troubling you this morning, you're not going to like a lot of the sermons which are coming up from Peter's letters. In **1 Peter 1:14-16** he reminds us that as obedient children of God, we are to be holy. In **1 Peter 2:13-16** he reminds us to be obedient and submit to civil authorities, that we might silence the ignorance of foolish men. In **1 Peter 2:18** he reminds servants to be obedient to their masters. In **1 Peter 3:1** he reminds the wives to be obedient to their husbands. In **1 Peter 4:17** he reminds us that there are grave consequences to those who are not obedient the gospel of God. In **1 Peter 5:11** he reminds the younger people to be obedient to their elders.

In other words if we want to stay in the household of God and enjoy the privileges which come from God then we need to be obedient to His word. Because along with the privilege of being chosen and through the setting apart work of the Holy Spirit, comes the blessing of forgiveness. The **RSV** translation says, **1 Peter 1:2** "The people chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood. May grace and peace be yours in abundance!"

As Christians we enjoy the forgiveness of our sins, or as Peter says, we enjoy the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Now let me make this clear, the blessing of forgiveness of our sins is only made possible by the death of Christ. We cannot earn God's forgiveness by our good works; we cannot pay to be forgiven. We cannot make God forgive us simply by just believing in Him.

No! It all comes back to our favourite topic, **obedience**. The very Peter whose letters we are preaching through, the very same Peter who preached at the very first gospel meeting. The very same Peter when he was asked 'Brothers what should we do to be saved?' in **Acts 2:37** replied by saying, 'you all need to be obedient to God's Word' just like he was. **Acts 2:38** "Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit".

Let me make this as clear as I can, and if you have a problem with the next sentence I'm about to say then let me remind you that you don't have an issue with me, you have an issue with the Holy Spirit Himself after all He wrote the very words were reading. **Ok are you ready?** No baptism equals no forgiveness of sins. Now I understand that there are people out there who are not capable of being obedient to God's word whether it's because they are too young or have some mental conditions where they can't comprehend what they are doing.

But for the vast majority of mankind, they do know what they are doing and they do have the comprehension to understand what God requires of them. Let me say it again, if a person has never been baptised into Christ, they are still in their sinful condition. **Colossians 2:12+13** “For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ through your faith in the active power of God, who raised him from death. You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were Gentiles without the Law. But God has now brought you to life with Christ. God forgave us all our sins”.

God offers everyone forgiveness but the terms and conditions say first of all you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you through His word this morning. The Spirit says in **Romans 10:17** “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ.”

The second requirement which God wants from you is to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Spirit says in **John 3:36** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” The third requirement which God wants from you is to confess His name before men. The Spirit says in **Romans 10:9+10** “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

The fourth requirement which God wants from you is to repent of whatever sin that is in your live. The Holy Spirit says in **Luke 13:3** “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish”. And finally the fifth requirement which God wants from you is to be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins, and God will dwell in you in the form of His Spirit. The Holy Spirit says in **Acts 22:16** “What are you waiting for now? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name.”

So you see loved ones our journey as Christians begins with obedience and that obedience brings privileges. But that obedience doesn't end at our baptism; remember for Christians to continue to enjoy the privileges which come from being a Christian we need to be obedient to God all the days of our lives. Because the only people who are going to go to enter heaven are those who respond to the words of Jesus when He says, ‘enter ye in good and faithful servant.’

Now just before we finish I want to raise an important thought. God demands obedience, there is no arguing that but He also knows that there will be times when we mess up and we're not obedient to Him even after our baptism. And I want to show you those two principles from the Bible.

Please turn your Bibles to **1 John 1:7-9** “But if we live in the light---just as he is in the light---then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.”

Now I don't know about you but I have always walked in the dark. When I was a kid I used to do it more as a challenge; an adventure. Now as an adult, I suppose it is more out of habit than anything else. If I get up in the middle of the night, I refuse to turn on the lights. Instead of simply flipping a switch and lighting my way, I wander around in the dark, relying on my sixth sense to guide me. Usually, I guess from all these years of practice, I can get to my intended destination without incident. However, a few nights ago proved to be one of exception and painful consequence.

After being in bed for an hour or so, I got up to get a drink of water. With my mouth as dry as the inside of a Wheatabix box, I shuffled down the stairs half asleep but still awake enough to enjoy the tickling feeling the carpet made on my feet. As I cleared the bottom of the stairs, it felt good to pause by the heater. Continuing on only a few shuffles more, I met my doom. I think I actually felt the pain before it happened. With one fairly innocent shuffle, I crashed my foot into the kitchen door. The force was so great it knocked the door open, and left me in a painful pile on the floor. The scream was muffled only because I had a mouth full of plush pile carpet. If I had only turned on the light, I would have avoided the pain!

You see loved ones too often Christians forget that they shouldn't spiritually walk around in the dark. Not only should they avoid the darkness, they should also be a light that exposes the evil that is found in darkness. So the Spirit says one of the terms and conditions of being a Christian is to walk in the light as He is in the light. The other term and condition says we need to be real with ourselves and realise that we still sin.

And the final term and condition which the Spirit mentions here is that we need to confess our sins to God.

Because loved ones it's only if we are obedient to those terms and conditions can we truly rely on the same blood of Christ which washed us clean at our baptism for that forgiveness to continue. With the honour and privilege of been chosen by God before the Earth was created. With the honour and privilege of being set apart through the Holy Spirit to do good work for God. With the honour and privilege which comes from being obedient to God's word in trying to live holy and pure lives.

With the amazing honour and privilege of being able to walk in the light and confess our sins to God so that the blood of Christ can continually wash us clean. We are truly blessed as His children and if that's not enough of a reason to feel privileged and blessed let me leave you with Peter's own words which remind us of two other privileges which are given to all Christians. **1 Peter 1:2 "Grace to you and peace be multiplied"**