

## Can You Tell The Difference?

We are receiving new members into the church today and I want to take this opportunity to share some thoughts about the church and who we have been called to be. This past Tuesday morning in our staff meeting we spent some time talking about last Sunday's Father's Day sermon. Dan mentioned that in his growing up years he and his siblings lived by a different standard than their other friends and classmates. He said when we argued that everyone else was doing something, his dad would answer, "So what? What does that have to do with you? That's not how we live our lives." Dan made the statement that as believers we have been called to be different. I began to wonder if we as the church are called to be different than the world, can anyone tell the difference?

In speaking of the church, here is what the bible says, **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9**

We have been called to something different, to a different lifestyle, with different values, desires, standards and all under the umbrella of a different purpose. The bible's description of the church sets it apart. A chosen people we are. The Greek word most often used to refer to the church in the bible means "called out ones, chosen ones." The church is a chosen people, a holy people.

Over the years it seems that many in the church resented being defined and stereotyped as conservative and narrow minded by folks that didn't really know us or the gospel. We tried to redefine ourselves, to show the world we could fit into the culture and in the process we lost our distinctiveness. "See, we are just like you only we go to church." And the problem is the world looked at Christians and the church and decided, "You're right. You are just like me. There is no difference so why waste my time."

Saints of God, we have been called to be the church. We have been chosen by his grace and he refers to us as his treasured people. "A people belonging to God" is speaking of a favored treasure, a personal treasure. King James calls us a peculiar people. A people set apart.

Peter says by being the church we are to live in such a way that the difference is apparent. He thought there was no way you could miss it. It is the difference between darkness and light.

The passage then continues to define who we are and how we live. **“I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” 1 Peter 2:11-12**

Live as strangers. We aren't trying to prove we belong here. We don't. As people who belong to God, abstain from those choices that are not pleasing to Him and those choices which war against the spiritual life. Live in such a way that those who are not followers of Christ can see the difference. And be aware that difference is not self-righteousness or a holier than thou attitude, but it is good deeds, living an others centered, servant hearted, Christ like life.

We have been called to be different in order to make a difference. We are called to be a peculiar people, a called out people, a prepared, chosen, set apart people, selected for his purposes and his cause and calling. Let me mention three things this morning to which we have been called.

**We are called to a higher standard.** God dares to put his name upon us. We have been called the sons and daughters of God. We are the people of God. We are to bear his nature and reflect the character of God. We are to live by the values of our heavenly father, not the values of our culture. So what if the rest of the world is living in sin and disobedience to God's word, we are God's holy people, God's called out people, we have been called to a higher standard. We bear his name, his spiritual dna. We have a responsibility to live for him and like him because we have been died for. We are called to a higher standard.

We are salt and light. We are in this world but we are supposed to be transformational. We are supposed to be making a difference in the world, dispelling darkness not by pointing a finger at it and wagging our heads, but by bearing the light. Not judging the world, but living our lives in such a way that as the bible says, the world, the non-believers, even though they may accuse us of doing wrong, they won't be able

to find fault and will eventually have to acknowledge our good deeds before God.

We are called to a different and higher standard. The question is, Are we different? Are we making a difference? In our family? In our school? On our job? In our community? Wherever the church is, are we making a difference? If we aren't, shouldn't we be asking why? Have we compromised? Have we failed to walk in love? Have we failed to be like Christ in our dealings with others? Have we let down our standard? How we live our lives, in word and in deed, should reflect that higher standard of the kingdom of God.

But notice this, we have been called to a higher standard because: **We are called to a greater purpose.** A greater purpose demands a higher standard. We aren't called to just take up space and use up air, to breed like rabbits, live any way we want and then hope to die with the most toys. We are called to a greater purpose, a great and high calling.

Let me give you an example. I know we've got some young men in the youth group that are playing golf. If you want to learn to play as a hobby, as a recreation for yourself, you can go hit some balls and learn the basics and play a couple of times a week and become pretty good. But if your purpose, your goal is to play in the PGA, to win the US Open, to be the next Tiger Woods, then that goal is going to demand a lot more work and practice and lessons and training and preparation than every other person on the golf team. A greater purpose and goal will demand a higher standard from you.

If you want to be a gymnast and go to college and be on a college gymnastic team you have to work hard at it and your coach will set a pretty high standard for you in order to achieve your goal. But if you want to be an Olympic Gold medalist, that demands a whole other standard. That means living away from family and training everyday. That means working and practicing while your friends are doing all the fun stuff they wanted to do. It means sacrifice and work and determination. It means a higher standard because: **A greater purpose demands a higher standard.** Pick piano playing, football, anything you want. I can play piano okay, but if I want to be a concert pianist, that is a greater purpose that requires and demands a higher standard.

You get the picture. We have been called to a greater purpose so we must live

accordingly. Our choices in life are made based upon a higher standard, based upon his standards. We live according to a biblical standard because we live for a greater purpose.

What is the purpose? There are lots of answers to that question as revealed in the Scripture. **What is our purpose? 1) To do the good works for which we were created.** The bible says, **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10.** Everyday there are opportunities to make the right choice, to obey God, to bless and serve others, to be salt and light, to carry out God’s purpose and God’s will in your world. Don’t live your life in such a way that you compromise or lessen or weaken your ability to perform those good works for which you were created. You have committed yourself to a higher standard because you are committed to a greater purpose – to do the works he has for you to do.

**What is our purpose? 2) To reflect the character of Christ in our world.**

The passage from 1 Peter tells us that we have been called out of darkness and into his marvelous light. We are now given the amazing opportunity and responsibility to bring the light of Christ, the brilliance of his character and his nature, into the darkness of the world.

What will that look like? Some of you bought and read copies of Gayle Erwin’s book *The Jesus Style*. Reflecting the character of Christ in the world will look something like that. Being a servant, others-centered, compassionate and gracious. I believe the character qualities of Christ are revealed to us in Galatians in what we refer to as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23.** How transformational those qualities would be when lived out in our world.

Here is our greater purpose. Here is our higher standard. Reflect the light of Christ in a dark world. Live the life of Christ before a wicked world. Can the world tell any difference? If we live for Christ, if we live to do his works, if our lives reveal the fruit of the Spirit, the world can’t help but notice the difference.

**What is our purpose? 3) To live out the message of the gospel.** There are a

lot of hopeless people in this world, living in brokenness, looking for answers, looking for relationship. They want to know if there is any truth left in this world. Is there any reason for hope. And here we come. The people of God. Called to live out the message of the gospel. We need to be what the apostle Paul referred to as “living letters”. He told the church in Corinth **“You yourselves are our letter...known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ...” 2 Corinthians 3:2-3**

Do we have a purpose? Yes. We are to be that letter from Christ, living out the good news of Jesus Christ before everyone we meet. We live out the message that God so loved the world he gave his only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but would have eternal life. We live out the message that God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but that the world through faith in him might be saved.

Do we have a purpose? Absolutely. We are sent as Christ's ambassadors, delivering a message to the world that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.” We have been sent to bear that good news. God wants you to come home to himself and be saved. If you come to him he will forgive and he will make you a new person from the inside out and you can have an amazing relationship with the God of mercy and grace.

Do we have a purpose? Yes. It is to spread the word that redemption is available to all, that no one is too far gone, that there is no such thing as a hopeless case.

You see, the church is the only hope this world has. We are the only people that can offer hope to the hopeless, the only people that can bring light into the darkness of this world. Do we have a purpose? Oh yes. There is no greater purpose and remember, a greater purpose demands a higher standard.

Then how can we live it out? The bible says we are to be holy as God himself is holy. Everywhere he calls us to holiness and godliness and to this higher standard. Can we live like that? A higher and holy standard? Not by our own efforts, no. But here is the third thing to which we've been called as the church. **We are called to a Spirit empowered life.**

The bible speaks of a sinful nature and a redeemed nature. In the book of Romans the bible says, **“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” Romans 8:8-9.** We aren’t controlled by sin and a sinful nature. We have been given a new nature. We are controlled by and empowered by the Spirit of God that dwells within us. We are reflecting the nature and character of Christ remember. Paul continues in this passage, **“...and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you. Therefore...we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it...”**

### **Romans 8:11-12**

How can we live this higher standard? How can we live out this life of greater purpose? We do it by the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is transformational power. It is the power that raised Jesus from the dead giving life to us, empowering us to make redeemed choices, right choices, to live a holy life, to say no to the sins of the world and the desires of the sinful nature. We live a life of obligation, not obligated to the sinful nature to live according to it and its desires, but instead to live a life that is pleasing to the one who died to save us and gave us eternal life and hope.

We are the church of Jesus Christ, living by God’s holy standard, living a life of great purpose by the power of the Holy Spirit. Rely upon his all sufficient grace and his enabling power.

You are part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ! He is calling us to a higher standard. Let’s live it. Let’s make the changes in our life so we know we are pleasing him.

Understand, you have been called to a greater purpose. What an amazing calling, to serve God, to obey His word, to do good works before the world so that others can see and be changed from death to life through Christ. It is a great purpose and calling. Let’s live it.

And trust in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in your life as you make some of the necessary changes. He will lead you and strengthen you. He will convict you and point you in the ways of truth and victory.

Let's give ourselves to his call to a higher standard, a greater purpose and a Spirit empowered life.

You are part of a place of healing, hope, laughter and peace. Some of you came feeling hopeless and you've found a life of hope. Some of you came without purpose and you've found your purpose in Christ. You've come to the right place – to his church, his body. We welcome you. Come walk with us as we learn to walk and live by his higher standard. Come journey with us as we discover and live out his purpose for our lives as individuals and as a community of faith. Come walk with us as people empowered by the Holy Spirit, doing business as Carbondale Assembly of God. A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful, glorious, brilliant light.

We are receiving new members this morning. As I call your name I would ask that you come forward and stand at the front facing the congregation for a moment.