

THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH
THE APOSTLES CREED - Part 7
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you here. Can you believe it is May? I hope you saw these cards when you came into church this morning. We have Bibles available and we also have Bible reading plans available because this month we are looking at ‘investing in growth.’ One of the ways that we know that we grow best is when we engage with God’s Word. So what we are doing this month is encouraging everyone to read one chapter a day that deals with the salvation that God has given to us. And I believe if all of us do that we will be a different people.

So we have some really cool things available. If you need a Bible or if you know someone who needs a Bible, there are lots of Bibles out front and please make sure you take one for yourself or for someone else. Not only that but we are asking you to bring your Bible with you to church. And I see lots of people did that and if this was an Awana Club you would all be getting a star or whatever they give for that. I was in an Awana Club for about six months, but then I stopped.

The other thing we want to encourage you about is an email that you should have received this week about this initiative. There was a little link on there that tells you how you can download Life Fellowship’s Bible reading plan. And if you want to engage with other people about God’s Word, it is a great way to find out what they are learning and thinking.

Today we are on the statement from the Apostles Creed of, ‘*The holy Christian church, the communion of saints.*’ We are in church and we are going to talk about church this morning. Now if you are familiar with the traditional Apostles Creed we have changed the wording a little bit, because normally it says, ‘*The holy Catholic church.*’ Are you guys familiar with that? And there is a reason why we changed that and that is because traditionally even though the wording is catholic, we believe that catholic carries a lot of baggage. A lot of time when people hear the word ‘catholic,’ they think of a denomination. The whole idea of the word ‘catholic’ was the essence of universal, that there is a holy universal church for all people, for every tribe, every nation, every tongue, and every generation, that there is a holy Christian church. And that is what we are going to learn about today. So please turn in your Bibles to I Peter Chapter 2 and we will be talking about the holy Christian church and the communion of saints. What is church and why is it so important?

This week on Thursday after work I drove up to Raleigh to spend the evening with my brother. We are big NFL football fans and we watched the draft together. If you are thinking that is weird that I drove two and a half hours to watch a four hour program that is just the kind of person that I am. But it was football for four hours, with lots of hot wings. It was just us guys, and it was just awesome to be able to hang out together. I drove back Friday, and on the way back as I was pulling off 45 to go to Denver there was a truck that pulled up right next to me at the stoplight. It was a truck that had this wrap around it advertising something. And this person was not advertising a business; he was

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advertising a church for a ministry. And this was their tagline for their church: *'We are not about church, we are about people.'*

And I just thought that was interesting. What is the point that he was trying to make? I think the point he was trying to make was, *'listen, you have heard of church. You know about church, and it is dumb. But we are better than that because we are about people.'* And it made me think about that. I knew I was going to be preaching on church this Sunday and it had me wondering when did church become this negative thing? When did it become church-ey? If you used the adjective saying, *'something is church-ey,'* what would you be thinking?

It must not be good. If you ask how the church service was or how was the music, you may hear, *'Well, it was a little church-ey.'* And church can become this negative thing. I was driving through a town in South Carolina one time and there was a billboard for a church that said, *'We are not your typical church. We are better than that typical church.'* So what is it about church that makes it seem negative in our culture and in our society today? And it really made me ask myself the question – what is church? When we think about church, what is church?

And when we say the word 'church' I believe there is lots of baggage that can come with that word. There can be all kinds of emotions. There can be all kinds of experiences. Whatever can be added to it when you hear the word 'church,' you are thinking of something, and many times the baggage that comes with that word isn't necessarily good. There are words that you can throw out into a crowd and it will draw emotions, it will draw some kind of reaction or response.

For example, if I say 'Trump,' you all think about something, don't you? You are all feeling something right now. Some of you had your blood pressure go up. That is a word that carries stuff with it. And 'church' is one of those words that carries stuff with it too. So what we have to do is kind of break through some of the baggage that comes with that word, we need to understand the baggage that we have with that word, and then get back to the Bible and understand what church is.

What we need to remember is that we cannot let our experience and we cannot allow culture to define what church is. That is the mistake we make. Maybe some of us have had a really bad experience with church, or you know of people who have had bad experiences. Some people may say, *'I love to go to church,'* while others may say, *'I will never go to church again.'* And if you asked them why they don't want to go to church they may tell you about a horrible church experience they had.

And I have heard some of those experiences. I have had conversations with people and I have thought after hearing some of them that that church should just shut down because it was horrible. No one should have been treated the way they were. And many people have this baggage of experience of things that have happened in a church.

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Others may have baggage of preconceived ideas of church like it is just a location or just a place to go.

So think about how we use that term ‘church.’ Church is supposed to be referring to a group of people. If you play basketball or soccer or baseball, you don’t tell your parents, ‘*Hey, I am going to team today.*’ We would never use that term ‘team’ but rather we would say, ‘*I am going to basketball practice*’ or ‘*I am going to play baseball.*’ But when we say we are going to church we just sometimes think about the location or of the building. Church is this thing we do; it is a part of the cycle of our week, like I go to the gym, and I go to church.

And it becomes the weekly rhythm of our lives. But is that really church, because it lacks the fullness of what church is? So we are going to read a passage of Scripture that deals with the nature and the identity of church. And we need to understand that the main idea of the church is a distinct people defined by Jesus and His gospel. Let me say that again. The church is a distinct people defined by Jesus and His gospel.

Church is not about a building. It does not have to necessarily be in a building. It is not a place and it is not a time though there are times set that we gather in those moments. Church isn’t evil or wicked no matter what experiences you may have had. It is like if you were a child and were bitten by a dog and you had a fear of dogs for the rest of your life. That can happen, but it doesn’t mean that because you were bitten by a dog when you were a child that all dogs are evil. So if you have had a bad experience with church it doesn’t mean that church necessarily is evil.

The church is a distinct people and it isn’t bad. It is not a place or a routine but it is a distinct people defined by Jesus. We have to understand the necessity of the connection of Jesus Christ and the people of God. So I want us to read I Peter Chapter 2 and verses 1 through 12. Peter is writing this letter to a Jewish audience. The very first verse of this letter he tells us that he is writing to elect exiles who were scattered to all these different places that he names. So it not particularly to a unique local church like Paul wrote. Paul did write letters to a lot of unique churches, but Peter is writing more to an audience. He is writing to believers, to followers of Jesus who identify as a church.

So I want you to see in Chapter 2 of I Peter how many times church is mentioned. Let’s read Chapter 2. ***“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”**

For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” So the

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honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the Word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

All right, how many times did you see church in that chapter? How many times did Peter say church? That’s right – zero. But the church is all over this chapter. Did you notice that? Peter is talking about the church, but he uses words to describe the people of God. He uses terms that we might be unfamiliar with and they might sound a little weird to us, but he gives ten different Scriptures describing the identity of God’s people.

And I want you to see this. I am going to put all these terms on the screen so you can see them. And what we have to understand is if the people of God are a distinct people the first point is we must have a distinct identity. That is the first thing we need to understand is we have a distinct identity. And Peter gives us ten terms that describe this distinct identity that we have as the church.

Remember whenever we come to Scripture, whenever we come to God’s Word we need to ask it questions. He wants us to ask questions because that is how we learn. We come to this Scripture and we have to ask ourselves why if Peter is talking about the church then why does he never use the word church? Now the word ‘church’ in the Greek is *ecclesia*. Do you ever wonder if the Greek word is ‘*ecclesia*,’ how did we get the word ‘church’ from it? Well, we get the English word ‘church’ from the Scottish word ‘*kirk*’ which is their description of church. The German word for church is ‘*kirche*.’ So the English word for church comes from the evolving of other languages from ‘*ecclesia*.’ Sometimes we wonder what the connection is between the words ‘church’ and ‘*ecclesia*,’ and there is none. It is a morph word that over thousands of years has become what it is.

And in the original language the word ‘*ecclesia*’ is not mentioned here in I Peter Chapter 2. It is not mentioned in the entire letter of I Peter either. Yet Peter is talking to the church, so what is the big deal about not using the term. And here is what I believe, that the word *ecclesia* carried as much negative baggage with Peter’s audience as maybe

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it does today. And I am not saying that we should stop using the word ‘church,’ because that is not the point. The point is Peter was using descriptive words to identify our distinctiveness, and he is talking to an audience of Jewish Christians, Jewish believers, Jewish followers of Jesus.

So why would Peter use these terms? And why would he use so many of these terms? And I am thinking, ‘*Peter, enough. We get it. After verse 5 we know this is who we are.*’ But he keeps going through verse 12 with all these terms like ‘*living stones, spiritual house, holy priesthood, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people of His own possession, God’s people, sojourners, and exiles.*’

You may be sitting here this morning thinking that means nothing to you. And it might not. But I want to explain to you why it meant something to these Jewish people and how it relates to us today. So think about that, and notice that in this list of terms used there are three different groups. There is a grouping in verse 5, there is a grouping in verses 9 and 10, and then there is a grouping in verse 11. That is the first thing we need to notice is that there are different groups of terms. Peter didn’t list all ten terms in one group.

Then we have to ask the question – what is unique about a first century Jewish person hearing these terms and what would they have thought of them?. What are the memories, what is the identifier that they would have thought about? Let’s read verse 5 again. “***You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***”

What do you think came to the mind of a first century Jewish person with that verse? I think they would have thought about the temple of Solomon. The temple of Solomon which was this beautiful building made with precious stones. The temple of Solomon was the apex of the Israelites’ power and dominion. The kingdom of Israel was at its height when Solomon built this temple. They looked at the riches and the glory of the temple and thought of it as a symbol of their faith and their worship. Peter is saying, ‘*Hey, your identity with Jesus is to be similar to the identity that they had with the temple.*’

Now let’s look at the second grouping in verse 9. “***But you are a chosen race a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.***” What do you think a first century Jewish person would have thought of when they heard verse 9? I think they would have thought about Mount Sinai and the exodus. Now if you want to turn there, and I can hear you ruffle those pages, to the second book of the Bible in the Old Testament to Exodus Chapter 19 and verses 4 through 6.

God has brought the Israelite slaves out of oppression. He has brought the plagues on Egypt which was the most powerful nation on the planet until the Pharaoh

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released them. They have been wandering in the wilderness until they get to Mount Sinai where God speaks to them. God gives them the Ten Commandments there and He makes a covenant with the people of Israel. It is where the covenant God made with Abraham and now the covenant belongs not to just a family but with a nation. Something significant happened on Mount Sinai in Exodus Chapter 19.

Listen to the words of God when He speaks to the people at the foot of Mount Sinai before He gives the covenant and the Ten Commandments. Beginning in verse 4 it says: ***“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”***

Did you hear any words that were in I Peter Chapter 2? Peter is bringing them back to Mount Sinai. *‘You Jewish people found your identity in the temple. You found your identity in the covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai from the Old Testament Scriptures.’* Listen again to I Peter 2:11. ***“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”*** Notice how Peter uses the word ‘exiles’ in this letter.

Now what is significant about that term ‘exiles’ to the Jewish people? Remember that God brought judgment on the kingdom of Israel because they had rebelled against Him for so long until He eventually sent them into exile in Assyria and in Babylon where they were for seventy years before God brought them back to the Promised Land. What is going on here? We have to ask the question of why this is significant to us.

Now I could take all morning to try to explain each of these terms and how they are significant, but here is the main point I want you to grasp today. As Peter is talking to these Jewish Christians he is saying if they find their identity in anything that is greater than Jesus Christ then they have a wrong identity. Maybe we find our identity in our history, in our heritage, in our nationality, in the way we worship, or in our denomination. Maybe we find our identity in our gender, in our generation, in our successes, in our jobs, or in whatever, and many of us do that. And if we find our ultimate identity, in any of these things and it is taken away from us it becomes destructive to our lives.

What Peter is saying is our ultimate identity is to be in Jesus. He is to define who we are. We are to be like Jesus. Look at verse 4 again. ***“As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*** All of these terms described the nature of our salvation, the greatness of our salvation. And how Jesus is a better temple, He is a better way of worship, He is a better priesthood, He has a better

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covenant, and there is a better nation. All of this is about how Jesus is better, but now we have to look at ourselves to see what we have attached our own identity too.

As a parent we may have found our identity in our children. Maybe we have found our identity in our job. Maybe we have found our identity in our nationality or our politics. Maybe we have found our identity in our sexuality. Whatever it is if there is anything that trumps Jesus – it is a false identity that will leave us hurting, broken and disillusioned. And what brings the people of God together in this room is not how we sing songs, it is not our style of music, it is not the location, or convenience, or teaching, but what brings us together in this room is to be the person of Jesus Christ. The identity we are to have in Jesus is to be greater than any identity we can have outside of that, and if we find another identity we will simply play part time Christian. Our Christianity will be a world that we just visit, but it is not really something that has a massive impact on our lives.

I told you earlier that I drove to my brother's house last week so we could watch the NFL draft in his big living room. And we heard all these experts talking about the NFL draft and how everyone hopes that their team will pick the right guys. So there is this idea of hope and excitement. One of the things that these experts who are managers and coaches talked about was who they were going to target. Was it going to be this person or that person? And you will hear these kinds of things being said from these experts, *'We're looking for football players.'* Really? I thought that this was the NFL draft, so I certainly hope you pick a football player. I hope you don't pick an artist instead because I want you to pick a football player.

Now that is not what the experts meant. What they meant was there are a lot of guys that play football, but they are not football players. There are a lot of guys that play football because they want to party, or because they want the money or the fame. There are a lot of guys that do something to get something else but their identity is found in something other than playing football. Football is just the means to get them there. And these experts are saying they want guys who when they wake up in the morning they know who they are and everything in their life is about football. And in my opinion that is not healthy, but I understand why they want that because that is their job as managers and coaches.

And that is what Peter is calling us to do. When we wake up in the morning he wants us to think, *'I am a Jesus follower. I am part of a holy priesthood, a holy nation, an esteemed people defined by Jesus. That is who I am. I don't want there to be anything else that identifies me, not my gender, not my job, not my family, not the color of my skin, or my nationality. What I want to define me above everything else is Jesus Christ.'* And that is what the church is, and that is what we must remember. Anything that identifies us other than the person of Jesus will disappoint us.

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And that leads us to this – we have a distinct mission. Our mission should flow from our identity. There are purposes that flow from our identity. So if this is who we are, if we are a holy nation, if we are sojourners in exile, if we are living stones and a spiritual house, if all of these things are true of us, that leads us to say, ‘*Okay, if this is who I am then this is what I must do.*’ And we can’t get those reversed. Many of us try to live out the Christian life without first nailing down this is who I am, and this is why I do what I do. So our purpose and our mission is to flow from this identity. If we get the two mixed up, if we get them backward, we will get into trouble.

With this identity of priests and nation there are two instructions Peter gives to the people of God in this chapter that flow from our identity. Look at verse again where it says: “***You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***” So our purpose, our mission in life is to offer spiritual sacrifices. Now what does that mean? Well, I am going to go into a little detail about what that means but the idea is we are looked at in the context of a priest, and most of us don’t think of ourselves in the context of a priest. When we think of priests we usually think of a black outfit or a white robe and someone who is really dedicated to their religion. We think of a priest as a special holy person.

But in God’s Word it says we are all priests if you are a part of the family of God. If you identify yourself with Jesus you are a priest. What a priest does is they represent God to other people. So what Peter is saying is we represent Jesus everywhere we go. It is when you are on that soccer team, when you are in your work environment, when you are in your home, when you are in your neighborhood, when you are in your school, and everywhere you are you are a unique person and you are a priest. You represent someone greater than yourself in every environment. And what you are to do is offer spiritual sacrifice. You have the opportunity to display a life of worship to others, to show them what it looks like to follow Jesus.

There is a second mission that we have and it flows from our identity. Look again in verse 9. “***But you are a chosen race a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.***” Here it is – we are to “***proclaim the excellencies of Him.***” If we are the people who are identified as followers of Jesus then we have a story to tell. We have our own story to tell. We have a story to tell of how God has saved us. ‘*I was once lost but now I am found.*’

There is all this imagery in God’s Word and throughout the New Testament to describe what salvation is. Here Peter says we are called from darkness into light. There is other imagery that says we go from slavery to freedom, from an enemy of God to being His friend, from being a slave to sin to a slave of righteousness, from being sick to being healed; there are all these comparisons of what happens when you enter into God’s family, when you place your faith and trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. And when

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that happens to us, we get a new identity, we get a new purpose and because we have this new identity we get to tell everyone around us what we have experienced. It is just to flow from us and we have to tell people about Jesus.

And if we don't then it is shame on us. How many sermons have you heard where you heard someone say God isn't happy with you if you haven't told people about Jesus. And we sadly walk out of church thinking, 'I guess I have to tell people about Jesus.' But what did Peter say, "***That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him.***" No one should have to drag us; no one should have to make you tell others of the excellencies, the beauty, the goodness of Jesus.

Look what it says in verse 3, "***if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.***" If you have experienced His goodness, if you have experienced His power, if you have experienced the transformation of God from darkness into light, from slave to free, from broken to healed, you just have to tell someone about it. That is who we are and so what we do flows from our identity. This was important and there was a reason why the biblical authors used the Greek word *ecclesia* and the word *ecclesia* is a historical term. Most people when they heard the word *ecclesia* they would think of an assembly, an assembly of people called out, gathered, identified for something.

And there was a historical significance to that word. It really got most of its meaning and its power from Alexander the Great. His conquests over the ancient world resulted in one of the greatest empires ever. One of the things that was unique about Alexander the Great was he was able to Hellenize the ancient world, he was able to drastically change the cultures of Babylon, Syria and all the way to India, and from the Middle East to Africa and Europe.

So how was he able to overcome such a wide area before the Roman Empire and change so much about these cultures? He did it through Hellenization. What he did was instead of using the power of his armies to overtake these nations and kingdoms and put an oppressive thumb on them was to take all the people from his home kingdom that believed in their culture and spread them all around. And these home kingdom people were called the *ecclesia*. These people would enter into whatever nation or kingdom Alexander the Great had conquered and they would Hellenize the culture. The whole point was to show that this *ecclesia* could teach them health care, education, entertainment and religion, these things that were of interest to every human being. And these people, this *ecclesia*, displayed the glory of Hellenization, the glory of the Greek ways. They were to show the conquered nations how good they were and how beautiful Hellenization is. They didn't have to tear down anything like their religion or temples and they didn't have to change their school systems because they knew the people would come to them because they could show them something better and greater. That was the *ecclesia*. And that is the mission that we have and that is the opportunity that we have.

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I could end the sermon right here. And most of you might say, ‘*Well, that was a nice sermon.*’ But there was something bothering me as I kept reading and studying and it was this one fact. See, we can identify ourselves as followers of Jesus. We can identify ourselves with the people of God as the church. And we can understand our mission to offer spiritual sacrifices, and we can understand that we need to proclaim the excellencies of Christ to people, but we could also miss something very important and that is Peter was obsessed with something in this letter that the people would not just know who they were, or not just know their mission and purpose in life, but he was obsessed with the word ‘holiness.’

Peter uses the word ‘holiness’ a number of times in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. And the word holiness means to be set apart. It is where this idea of distinctness comes from. We as the people of God should be distinct. We should be different. And many times I think this is the battle because most of us get the identity part. We know this is the mission and the purpose, but if we don’t have the holiness of Christ, the holiness of God we will miss out on the opportunity to display the power of God. Now none of us by nature are holy. None of us by nature would do holy things, but God invites us to partake of His holiness.

In I Peter Chapter 1 and verse 16 Peter says, “***Be holy as I am holy,***’ quoting the book of Leviticus. He is inviting us to live holy lives. So when we think about the word ‘holiness,’ this is how we are supposed to be known. What does holiness look like? We could talk about holiness all day long, but how does Peter describe it? What does it mean to be set apart? What does holiness look like today? What are the things that Peter talks about that is a principle for us today? And I found that it was really cool to see how many things Peter said about how to stand out and how to be distinct, because it is so applicable for us today.

So I want you to see those things. Number one – what does he mean by holiness? We have a distinct way of enjoying pleasure. Now how many of you when you think of holy you think it sounds like fun? Holiness and fun like peanut butter and jelly, right? No, usually when we think of holiness we think we need to beat our bodies into submission, or we need to withhold things, cut things off, almost like going to a monastery somewhere to get away from all the evil temptations of the world. And when I think of holiness it is not about fun.

But look what Peter says in verse 11 and 12 in our passage, “***as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.***” Listen, Peter is not saying that we aren’t to have any fun; what he is saying is we should not be controlled by our lusts, not be controlled by our desires, and not be controlled by our appetites. Today we live in a world and in a culture by what we desire is who we are. If I have a desire to do something then that must be who I am. We draw our identity from our desires and that is not the way of God. God says, ‘*This is who you are and let it influence what you desire.*’ That is the way of God.

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We have this idea that to truly enjoy things, such as the passions of the flesh that they are just natural physical desires whether it comes to sex, or food, or drugs, or drink or sleeping. It is just these things that seem natural to us and we desire them. And Peter is saying not to let those things control us. He wants us to enjoy sex, to enjoy food, to enjoy sleeping, or other physical activities, but to enjoy them in a way that honors God and through the lens of holiness. And if we indulge in them in a way that is how you define yourself that is when your life becomes broken. If you indulge in them and let them define you, you will find that they are not pleasurable or enjoyable and it will end in brokenness.

The second thing is we have a distinct way of honoring human authorities and of loving people. I am not going to take the time to read all this but Peter says to honor the emperor and love everyone. Listen, it doesn't matter your political party. When Peter is writing this letter Nero is the Emperor, and if you think that your president is bad, and I don't care if you are a Democrat or a Republican, nothing compares to Nero. What we have is a cakewalk compared to Nero.

And Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says we are to honor our leaders. *'Honor the guy who wants to kill me?'* Yes, we are to honor him. *'But he is a bad dude.'* Honor him is what the Bible says. And that is what holiness looks like. Holiness means that we are people that honor everyone horizontally and vertically above us. We are not to be obnoxious; we are not to be mean spirited. So can people look at your Facebook thread and believe that you obey this? We need to be holy.

Number three is we have a distinct way of working. In verses 18 through 25 Peter is talking to slaves. I know we don't have slaves today, but the whole context in these verses is to slaves. The closest thing that we have to being a slave is employment. Some of you are like, *'Amen.'* The idea here is that as Christians we should have a distinct way of working for our employers, even if they are jerks, even if they are mean, even if they treat us unjustly. We have the opportunity to be gracious, to be diligent and to be kind. This is an opportunity to show our holiness. Holiness is being able to walk into our work environment and even if the boss is a jerk, and the people around us are weird, we can still know that God has us here for a purpose, and we can live it out. And we can display the excellencies, the glories of Jesus Christ.

We also have a distinct way of enjoying marriage. I Peter Chapter 3 and verses 1 through 4 says: ***"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."***

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Skip down to verse 7 and it says: *“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”*

Listen, we have the opportunity to have our marriages look different, that we honor one another. Peter is talking to wives in this context and he tells them that if they have a husband who is not a Christian, or if he is not a spiritual leader, what the wife is to do is to nag them to death – right? (*Laughter.*) Is that what he says? No, wives if you have a husband who is not living according to God’s Word live out your own faith so that they may be won over without a word. That is holiness.

Further on Peter tells ladies they are not to be known by how they wear their hair or how they show off their body, but they are to be known by their inner character of their heart as a person of love. Modesty is a dying value in our culture today. I have a sixteen year old daughter and I get it; it is hard. But we have a responsibility to teach the young generation. It is very hard for me to talk about modesty because I grew up in an independent Baptist background where they walked around with rulers measuring the length of girl’s skirts or the length of guy’s hair. But modesty isn’t Ben’s rules; it is God’s Word and He wants us to be a distinct people of holiness so we should dress differently. I am not saying dress like the Amish, I am not saying we need to walk around with rulers, but there should be something in our appearance that reflects the holiness of God.

And guys, verse 7 summed up says that your spouses need to be the greatest priority in your life outside of your relationship with God. Honor her as the weaker vessel, and weaker does not mean as something that is less than. That word ‘weaker’ is the idea of something more precious, more valuable. The most precious thing that you have in your life is your wife; but does she know it? Does she feel it? Does she believe that? Could she testify to that? Your wife should be more precious to you than your job, your career, your bank account, your sports team, your friends and she should know that she is the most precious thing in your life. That is holiness.

Lastly, we should have a distinct way of suffering. The rest of the chapter Peter talks to a people who are going through suffering. And he says when we suffer we get the opportunity to show people Jesus. Do you know why? It was because Jesus suffered for us and He suffered unjustly. Every times we suffer, whether it is justly or unjustly, we get the opportunity to show what a holy life looks like. We get the opportunity to show the grace of God and the humility of Jesus.

In all of these things we have the opportunity to be distinct. We aren’t to just walk out of here with an identity and with a mission, but we have unique opportunities every day no matter what environment we are in to display the holiness of Jesus. And that is because Jesus is that chief cornerstone. I love that verbiage in I Peter Chapter 2 that talks about the cornerstone because in ancient buildings the cornerstone had to be

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perfect. Every stone that was stacked on it had to be perfect because if it was off by one degree you would soon know it. Width, depth and height had to be built on the perfection of that cornerstone. And that is what we need to do and that is to line up with Jesus as our cornerstone for the holiness in our lives.

The holy Christian church, the communion of saints from the Apostles Creed means we are a distinct people defined by Jesus Christ. We have a distinct identity; we have a distinct mission, and a distinct opportunity. I have three questions and then we are done.

Number one – what is your primary identity? Where do you find your primary identity? When you wake up in the morning what drives you – is it your career, is it your family, is it your sports team, or are you identified with the person of Jesus as this is who you are?

Number two – how obedient are you to your mission? If this is who you are then how obedient are you to the mission that you have to offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the excellencies of Christ?

Number three – how distinct are you? In your environment, in your work, in your school, with your friends, do you display the holiness of Christ? Are you holy as He is holy? That is the opportunity that we have. Guess what – when we live holy lives that don't come natural to us people will notice. Peter says in Chapter 2: “***that they may see your good deeds and glorify God.***” Even people who hate your guts can see your good deeds and glorify God. And we can trust in God's Word that this will happen.

This is who we are as the holy Christian church. And I hope as we leave here today we don't let our experiences, we don't let our baggage, we don't let our culture define church, but we let the Word of God define church for us.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.