

## Chosen and distinct

### Introduction

Much of what we read about the nation of Israel in the OT is directly applicable to us as NT believers. In 1 Peter 2v9-10 it says that we are a holy nation like Israel, set apart for God. This starts with God's work of 'justification', the spiritual re-birth that occurred at conversion through faith in Jesus. The OT dealings of God with Israel are analogous to our 'sanctification' or 'setting apart' – a life-long process made possible by our continual obedience to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### Background

Nehemiah 1-6, wall completed and adversaries banished

Ch 7, almost 50000 people return

Ch 8-10, revival: conviction of sin, confession, celebration and commitment

Particularly: separation from foreigners (10v30), keeping the Sabbath (10v31) and tithing (10v32-39)

In other words, being distinct in three ways: (1) how we are influenced (2) in our activities (3) in our affections. But we read that they renege on their promises: tithing (13v10-13), Sabbath (13v15-16), separation (13v23)

Let's look now at those three areas of commitment: influences, activities and affection

### Our influences

We read in Neh 10v30 that the Israelites were commanded not to inter-marry people from the surrounding nations. Firstly, let's look at how this reflects God's nature. The first heavenly song recorded in Revelation (chapter 4v8) starts the refrain that God is holy. This means He is altogether distinct from all creation. There is no-one like Him, not even close. Little surprise then that His people are to also express this 'distinctness'. As it says in 1 Pet 1v16 "Be holy, for I am holy".

### Relational

Relationships probably represent the greatest influence in our lives. It is difficult to have a close relationship if two people are 'walking' in fundamentally different directions. Either the relationship will break, or someone will compromise.

In 2 Cor 6v14-16 Paul mentions five virtues that are lacking in an unequally 'yoked' relationship: partnership, fellowship, harmony, commonality and agreement. By inference, we can conclude that when people are in unity these fruits are present.

So, there are two sides to this: distinctiveness from the world and agreement with other believers. We are to be salt and light in the world, as well as enjoying God's blessing as a people walking together under His leadership.

### Non-relational

Apart from relationships, we can also be swayed by what we watch and listen to. We must guard our heart and mind when engaging with both main-stream and social media. There are a multitude of opinions and 'truths' that are often contrary to God's truth. We must filter what

we see and hear through scripture, not allowing ourselves to be drawn into a worldly paradigm.

In 2 Tim 4v3-4 Paul said that in the end times people would find 'teachers' to tell them what they want to hear. The media is one of the primary means by which we are 'taught', mostly in a way that is contrary to God's best for us.

Rom 12v2 warns about being conformed to the world, but rather to be transformed by the renewing of our mind so that you can know the will of God. The inference being that without God's power and truth at work in our lives **we will** think the way the world does.

### **Our activities**

God is good and cares for us (Ps 119v68 and 1 Peter 4v7)

The other nations were trading on the Sabbath and they were entitled to do so. However, God had instructed Israel not to. Apart from the practical need for rest, it emphasised a continual trust in God's provision.

Starting at creation, God promised to meet all our needs. He gave Adam and Eve all they needed, together with instructions on how to partner with Him to extend His kingdom – **nothing has changed**. Unfortunately, our tendency to grasp for those things that we feel God has kept from us is something that has also carried on from the garden.

Sabbath is a continual reminder that the good in our lives comes from God and not our activity (see James 1v17). The one day of deliberate rest, makes us aware of His provision in the other six.

Jesus said Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2v27). In the New Covenant, this Sabbath rest is continual not once a week. We can live in a constant place of knowing God's provision and rest, even when circumstances contend and tempt us to strive and worry.

Hebrews 3 & 4 uses the promised land as an OT picture of NT rest. The admonishment is that Israel did not enter into God's rest because of unbelief – the promise was not realised because it was not 'mixed with faith'. The other specific episode referenced is where the Israelites complained because of the lack of water in the wilderness – they contended with God. They 'hearts were hard' with respect to God's provision. As an orphan-spirited people they expected the worst, so either complained about lack or strived to get.

For us therefore, the everyday rest that God has promised is entered into by faith. We must believe that a life free of striving and grasping is possible because of God's abundant provision.

### **Our affections**

The Israelites committed to tithing, but then didn't do it. Let's just be clear from the outset, tithing is not really about giving money to God or to those in need. Giving money according to God's instruction is all about our affections. God alone is worthy of worship because of His nature (Rev 4v11) and His works (Rev 5v12)

Now that's not to say there isn't a sowing and reaping principle, or that there aren't blessings and curses associated with our giving – but what God is really after is our heart. The truth is, our use of money exposes the issues of our heart very clearly. We spend our money in the places of our affection. When we give money away, God is more able to loosen materialism's insidious grip on us, thus freeing us to turn our love towards Him.

Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart is also” Matt 6v21. He went on to identify mammon (or materialism) as a master that demands allegiance in place of God (v24). The parable of the sower identifies the “deceitfulness of riches” as one of the things that's makes us spiritually unfruitful.

The rich young ruler models the hold that money has on us – it prevented him from following Jesus.

Most beautiful example given in Mark 14v3-11; conflict between love of God and love of money. Judas hated the extravagant sacrificial worship offered by Mary because he was motivated by greed.

James 2v5, 2 Cor 8v14-15 and Acts 4v34-35.

One of the other benefits of giving our money away is that it sensitises us in other areas of giving. In order for a community to thrive there needs to be a flow of resources. No one person has it all and so we need each other. But apart from financial sharing there needs to be giving of time, energy, vision, giftings and whatever else God has graced you with.