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How Do I Know I'm Saved?

1 Peter 1:1-2

Prayer: *Father, again I just I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the gift of your Son. You are a good, good Father. And on this Father's day we just want to remember the ultimate father, as Eric said, is you and we thank you for that, Father. We pray for your Holy Spirit's presence here this morning. And again, Lord, this is your word and your word is true and is right and is understandable but we need your Holy Spirit to help us, to guide us as with delve into it. I pray especially for the presence of your Spirit this morning, that you'd give us the ability to hear and to understand and to make this of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

A little while back I was driving down Route 17 and I saw a billboard that was advertising a firm that specialized in DWI, that's driving under the influence. And the billboard showed a police car and a hapless victim, and in giant letters it had the phrase "We can work it out." In other words, hire us and we're going to get you the best deal you could possibly get. Hire us

because we know the system, we can make this as painless as possible.

Well, you know, the same can be said about the way many folks approach religion. You know, God is the cosmic police force and we all sense that we're law breakers and religion is human beings looking for the best way to work this out. Religion is defined in the dictionary as belief in a god or gods and many folks think of Christianity as just it's another religion. I mean it's one that's made up of people who believe that Jesus was the son of God, that he was born of a virgin, that he died on a cross and that he rose from the grave, having conquered death. They think if they believe all of those statements about Christ, then by definition, they're part of the Christian religion. And by the dictionary definition they're correct, but God doesn't go by dictionary definitions. And a simple belief in the Christian religion does not make you a child of God or an heir of his kingdom.

A Gallup poll says the vast majority of people in the United States share a religious belief in Christianity and yet we butcher our unborn to the tune of a million a year. We've completely normalized the perversion of pornography, and marriage is no longer a sacred bond between a man and a woman and we continually remove from the trace of God from the public sphere. Now all of that is

not new, all of that is not unique but there is something unique about what's going on right now. And what is unique in our time and culture is that every one of these issues, from abortion, through same-sex marriage, through removal of God in our public life, they all have very vocal proponents pushing it literally in the name of Christianity.

Nicholas Kristof writing in the *New York Times* said this about Dr. Willie Parker, a Christian abortionist. He said -- quote -- "Dr. Parker is black, feminist, and driven by his Christian faith to provide abortions in the South where women seeking to terminate a pregnancy have few options. 'I believe that as an abortion provider I'm doing God's work,' Parker writes in his new memoir, *'Life's Work.'* 'I am protecting women's rights, the human right to decide their future for themselves, and with their lives as they see fit.'"

Dr. Parker claims it's his faith that drives his abortion practice. And you know, same sex is no different, same-sex marriage is no different, I mean it now has legions of evangelical proponents like Matthew Vines who wrote the best seller *God and the Gay Christian*. He also spearheads The Reformation Project which is "A Bible-based, Christian grassroots organization that works to promote inclusion of LGBT people by reforming church teaching on sexual orientation

and gender identity. Our vision is of a global church that fully affirms LGBT people."

Well, within the evangelical church there are now legions of people who no longer see the LGBT life-style as a sin issue, one that requires compassion and prayer and commitment but now it's seen as a Christian alternative life-style, one that just needs affirmation.

In terms of God being pushed out of the public square I'd like you to consider the case of Russell Vogt. See, a while back Mr. Vogt was being considered for a position and it was the position of Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget. And it seems that Bernie Sanders had found out that this man had written a blog post saying that Christ alone is the source of salvation and that all other religions including Islam were deficient.

Well, according to NPR Sanders questioned him and his questioning went like this: "Do you believe people in the Muslim religion stand condemned?" Sanders asked. "What about Jews? Do they stand condemned, too?" "I'm a Christian," Vogt repeatedly responded. "I understand you are a Christian," Sanders said, raising his voice. The senator is Jewish and has said he's not particularly religious. "But there are other people who have different religions in this

country and around the world. In your judgment, do you think that people who are not Christians are going to be condemned?" "I believe that all individuals are made in the image of God and are worthy of dignity and respect regardless of their religious beliefs," Vogt said, while also emphasizing "the centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation." "This nominee is not really someone who this country is supposed to be about," Sanders said, announcing he'd vote against him.

Well NPR quoted Russell Moore who called Sanders' comments -- quote -- "breathtakingly audacious and shockingly ignorant, and deeply troubling even if they are legal. This is not some arcane or obscure private opinion being held by this one individual," Moore told NPR. "The language that Sen. Sanders finds so disturbing -- 'stands condemned' -- is language right out of the New Testament." Moore says there's nothing hostile about Vogt's comments. "In Christian theology, no one is righteous before God," he said. "[Evangelical] Christians don't believe that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Christians believe that all of humanity is fallen." Well not so, said NPR.

And again commenting on Sanders' exchange, this is what *Christianity Today* had to say. It says: "As Vogt stated during his hearing, 'I'm a Christian, and I believe in a Christian set of

principles based on my faith.' Well, these distinctive beliefs—and any claim of exclusive salvation—are increasingly viewed as offensive or problematic. In America's pluralist landscape, even Christians are shifting away from such views. "When it comes to religion, the word exclusive is synonymous with bigot. Even worse, Christians who communicate the exclusivity of their faith are castigated and dismissed," wrote John C. Richards, who directs the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton.

See, according to *Pew Research*, 66 percent of all Christians and 52 percent of all evangelicals now believe there are many different pathways to heaven. I mean, in the eyes of many today to say that I'm a conservative evangelical Christian who believes Jesus when he says: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" is also to say, in the opinion of lots of folks who call themselves Christians, I'm being judgmental and therefore I'm a bigot. I mean, something just doesn't jibe here.

Mr. Vogt was guilty of saying that those who reject Christ face final judgment and that's no longer allowed in our culture. I mean there's one scripture that every single person in the country knows by heart and it's *Matthew 7:1*: "*Judge not, that you not be judged.*" I mean that's now interpreted to mean that no one can

make any judgment whatsoever about anybody else including character or behavior. But that's not what Jesus was saying. Jesus was referring to pronouncing final judgment on someone, not discerning their character, and what he was saying is that only God alone can pronounce final judgment on anyone because only God alone knows each person's heart. In no way was Jesus precluding making an assessment of an individual. In no way was Jesus precluding warning people about judgment to come, and that's something that Jesus did quite frequently.

I mean, if you just look at where that was spoken and what Jesus was saying, in the very same paragraph only five verses later, Jesus says: *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."* So my question is, okay, how do you distinguish between dogs and swine and everyone else without making some type of character judgment? I mean, I might pray for the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence but I don't think I'm going to spend a lot of time sharing the good news with them. And even with those folks, I'm in no position whatsoever to cast judgment, final judgment because only God knows the state of their souls.

And when it comes to assessing what matters with regard to faith, it's best not to look horizontally to your left or to your right

because there's so much confusion there. It's far more important to look vertically towards God and what he establishes in his word as to what it means to be a child of his. And then to ask yourself, okay, do I fit that description?

In short, we desperately need to know what real Christianity actually is and what the difference is between religion -- which saves absolutely nobody -- and a relationship with Christ which alone can save. Well, the good news is the apostle Paul can show us that difference. And it's found in a greeting that Peter sent to his fellow exiles. I mean, the greeting can tell us the difference between a relationship with Jesus Christ and the false hope of religion. And Peter's not giving us this long, indepth lecture on theology or he's not developing some elaborate test of belief, he's simply identifying the genuine believers that the Holy Spirit is addressing through him. It's just a greeting. It's at the very beginning of Peter's first letter and that greeting tells us a whole bunch about what it means to be a believer.

This is what Peter said. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ*

and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Well, there are five key words in that paragraph that can define for us whether or not our relationship with Jesus Christ is real. The very first word that may pop out at you in this paragraph is actually the dreaded E word. Peter says "*to God's elect, exiles.*" I can tell you that that word "elect" has caused me personally an awful lot of heartache and trouble over the years. And I can also tell you it is arguably one of the more disturbing words in all of scripture. But I can't for the life of me understand why, I mean, the word "elect" comes from the Greek word "eklektós" which literally means "selected." It means, as one commentator put it, "expressly selected by God as his special possession forever." It also means that none of us come to faith in Christ on our own. Every single one of us who are in the faith are here because God selected us before the foundations of earth were even established.

Now, many of us find that a very disturbing concept, something that we're alternately delighted and horrified by. I mean, delighted to think that we were chosen of God and horrified to think, well, we had nothing to do with it, that we had no say in it, that it wasn't fair or that it wasn't equitable and that everyone doesn't seem to have an equal chance at it. We're horrified that God would

practice some form of discrimination because from all appearances it appears that God does in fact discriminate, but all of our horrors are based on a false premise.

I mean, it's the premise that at some time, somewhere, somehow, someone ever deserved or could deserve to be chosen by God. So we construct theologies that are designed to get God off the hook for a practice that seemed to us to be patently unfair. I mean we get uncomfortable when God says, *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* And the more God goes out of his way to insist that election is by his choice alone, the more we go out of our way to resist that choice.

I mean God tells us in *Romans 3:10*, he says: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."* And he also tells us in *Ephesians 2* that we were already dead in our trespasses and sins when he chose us. He goes on to say that we were by our own very natures the objects of God's wrath and he says because of his great love for us -- quote -- *"even when we were dead in our trespasses, (he) made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved."*

See, dead men and women, they don't seek God, they don't reach out for him, they don't even recognize God for a very simple reason --

they're dead. And we want so much to cling to our notions of our God who is not arbitrary and capricious so that we insist that God's election, it's got to be based on some criteria that we can grasp, some reaching out on our part, some innate goodness, some longing after God, but God absolutely insists it's not that way.

We're horrified at God's statement in Romans 9 that he pronounces his love and his hatred on Isaac and Rebecca's twin boys while they're still in the womb of their mother. This is what God says. He says: *Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls -- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* That statement by God is by design. I mean, we all know you don't get more innocent in terms of fallenness than a baby that's still in the womb of it's mother. Their opportunity for good deeds or bad deeds doesn't even exist yet, but that's precisely why God chose in utero twins as his example. He says, *"They were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God's purpose of election might continue."*

Well, what's going on here? You see, God is resolutely disallowing human effort to have any say whatsoever in his divine choices. And

we're horrified by this verse, I mean, truth be told many of us would love to see it stricken from scripture, but there it is. God's stark insistence that our actions have no bearing whatsoever on his sovereign choices. Never have and never will.

I mean, Ephesians 1 and 2 tells us that God had a plan that he instituted before he even began creation and that he expressly selected as his own possession those who, though born with a heart of stone would be given a heart of flesh, and that these people would exist for the sole purpose of bringing honor and glory to God. Now if that sounds like we had no say or choice in the matter, it's because we had no say or choice in the matter.

And you have to understand something -- and this is critical -- God's sovereign choices, they were made from a pool of humanity that uniformly hated and feared him. To a man or woman, child or adult, we human beings hated the God who created us. Jesus himself said in *John 15:25*: "*They hated me without reason.*" And to those who find that hard to swallow, I simply point out the very same God who made himself vulnerable to us and lived among us flawlessly and we absolutely detested him for that.

You know, when Pilate displayed the flogged Jesus beaten within an inch of his life, crowned with a crown of thorns, he did it hoping

he could find some shred of sympathy among the people. He didn't understand the hatred we had for this flawless human being who did nothing but good his entire life. And so the sight of the stricken Jesus, it just incited our bloodlust. You know, torture wasn't enough; we howled for his crucifixion. *Matthew 27* says: *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"*

See, the people, the people who are being described here, that wasn't just the Jews and the Romans in Jerusalem, that was you and me. Now you may be thinking, no, that was not me, I was not there, I had nothing to do with that. But just ask yourself, before you became a Christian if you were in the middle of that crowd, would you have been the one person who said anything to prevent it? Would you have tried to stop it?

And I admit, most people have no overt feelings of hatred towards God, that's a given, they're shocked to hear that they might be having those feelings. But instead what they have is something that God finds even worse and that is complete indifference. That's worse than hatred. And understand, before God changed our

hearts, that's the gene pool that God made his sovereign choices from. There were no exceptions to the statement that God made in *Romans 3:10*: "*There's no good; no, not one.*" Basically God says every single one of us deserved annihilation. So always remember it was from that group that God selected us as his own forever.

I mean, if you're one of God's elect, you have the high privilege of being God's own possession. You were chosen by God and given by the Father as a gift to his Son. And that part strikes us as bizarre. And here's the amazing part: No one ever asked your permission. I mean, listen to what *John 17* says. This is Jesus praying for his disciples. This is what Jesus himself said. He said: "*I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.*"

There's a remarkable statement in those words. Jesus is saying, "Yours they were, you gave them to me." Well, we know that the disciples were autonomous individuals, we know they had free will. I mean, we even see them exercising their free will sinfully on numerous occasions. And yet Jesus says to his Father, you owned them from the beginning. He says, "*Yours they were, you gave them to me.*" Kind of shrinks our understanding how big, important and independent we really are.

You might say, well, we're not talking about the general population here, we're only talking about Jesus' disciples, I mean, they're an exception. But just continue reading John 17 and you see Jesus expanding that message to include not just the disciples but every one of us who believes. This is what Jesus said. He said: *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."* He's referring to you and me; he's referring to everybody who believes in Christ. He says, *"that they may all be one."* *"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."* You got to listen carefully to what Jesus is saying here. He says if you're one of God's sheep you are literally the possession of God given by God as a gift. It says you've been given by the Father as a gift to the Son for his glory. And again, the kicker is you have absolutely no say in it whatsoever.

Well, there's a second word in Peter's introduction this morning that we need to look at. The second word is this, he says: *Elect exiles, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.* This is what Peter says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*

You say, oh, boy, am I glad I saw that, because a lot of folks see the word "foreknowledge" and they think, oh, that takes the sting out of election, I mean, God doesn't choose us on the basis of nothing, he chose us on the basis of his foreknowledge. In other words, a God who's able to see through the corridors of time itself, he looked down through the corridors of time and he saw those who would be moving towards him with a pure heart and he rewarded those people with salvation. So they are elect but they're elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, so they think. I mean Hebrews says, *"God is a rewarder of all those who genuinely seek him."* Matthew says: *"He who seeks finds."* I mean, doesn't that still give us some kind of autonomy in this?

See, these folks think that if foreknowledge of my conduct is the basis of God's choice, then I still have some say in my choice because it was a result of my conduct. We might think God chose me but he chose me because he foreknew that I would be choosing him. He looked down through the corridors of time and he saw me moving in his direction and so he rewarded me with salvation. But what does God say about when he looks down through the whole course of human history? He says it in *Romans 3*. He says: *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God."*

He says, *"no one seeks for God."* We sit there, we scratch our head and say, wait a minute. There's lots of people who seek some kind of God, I mean, there's mosques and temples and churches that fill up every single week. But God insists they're not seeking him. He says they're seeking comfort or identification or solidarity or a host of other things associated with God but God insists it's not he, himself, that they are after.

You see, it doesn't matter when God looks to find men who are seeking after him, whether it be in the past, the present or the future, he'll not find any because he flat out tells us there is no one who seeks God. So there's only one reason why any of us is here today and that's the good news. The good news is because God first did a work in our hearts. I mean, did we seek after God? Of course we did. I mean, I tell people all the time, I said we seek God because we want to, but we only seek God because we want to because he first sought us.

And the question we have to ask, when we say we wanted God, we were after God, we were seeking God, is why did that happen? And how did that happen? Well, the answer is the Holy Spirit. I mean, why is it that some people have a heart and a passion for God's Spirit and others have none? Well again, the answer from scripture is that no one had that passion until God did a work in them. And the

work that he did is something we describe over and over again. It's clearly laid out in *Ezekiel 36*. This is God's word about what he does in those people whom he elects. He said: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Now you look at that statement and you realize the pronoun "I" appears six times in that passage and every single time it's speaking of what God is doing in us. I mean, I will sprinkle clean water on you, I will cleanse you, I will give you a new heart, I will put my spirit in you, I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to be obedient to my statutes and rules. And what God says, we were chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father to his credit and not ours. It's far more wonderful than saying of God he looked down through the corridors of time for a few good men and women and guess what, he found me.

See, the word "foreknow" is the Greek word "proginosko." And what that word actually means is to know intimately ahead of time. You

know, in the Bible the word "know," it's used by God to describe the intimacy of sex within marriage. In *Genesis 4* it says: *Adam knew Eve, and she bore Cain.* Matthew's gospel tells us that Joseph had no intimate relationship with Mary until after Jesus was born. It puts it this way, it says, Joseph *"knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."* Well that very same word for "to know" is used by God here in 1 Peter. He says: *"To those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."* And so what God is actually saying here is that he chose to know us as intimately as a husband knows his wife and that he chose to do so before the dawn of creation, before Adam even breathed. God says he selected us as his personal possession, that he knew us as intimately as we can be known ahead of time. The term "foreknow" has nothing to do with God scanning history for souls that are worthy of granting the gift of faith.

Now Peter's third word describes what the world thinks of elect individuals who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. Again, let me just read it. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his*

blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Okay. That's our third word. Peter is writing to *elect exiles*. Now some other versions might say *strangers*, some say *temporary residents*, some say *pilgrims*, but we what we see here yet another aspect of being God's elect. See, if you're in that category, then you are by definition, you are a stranger, you are a pilgrim, you are an exile. And in short what God is telling us that the elect of God are exiles who just don't fit with this world. And Jesus made that *crystally clear* in *John 15*. He said: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*

I have some serious doubts that Bernie Sanders ever read *John 15*, but if he did, he would find the source of his animus directed towards the director of office management and budget. It's right there. *"Because you are not of this world but I chose you out of this world, therefore the world hates you."*

You know, the world has its drives, it has its passions, it has its desires, but they're invariably opposed to the kingdom of God. And when you embrace the kingdom, you just will not fit in the other

kingdom.

You know, the world finds it strange and bizarre that we would give our lives over to an obscure carpenter who claimed to be God, that we would invest our lives in something that seems so anti-progress, so anti-science. Exiles don't see this world like the world does and vice versa. I mean, exiles are the first to admit that one of the strangest sounding things to them is that all of us started as some kind of primordial soup, guided by nothing and that we all evolved from soup into slime, into fish and then reptiles and then birds and then finally mammals, and again the whole process was guided by absolutely nothing. And then when we die we just rot.

And we're told we have no god, we need no god because we're here on our own and we answer to nobody. And I know that sounds perfectly reasonable to a lot of people. But what happens when something awful happens, something like a school shooting or something like the discovery of sex trafficking, something that everybody has a need to cry out against. Then again to me that makes no sense. I mean, animals don't cry out about the immorality of carnivores wantonly exploiting and killing them, and we're just animals. So why should we cry out when we encounter evil? And who do we cry out to?

I mean, I always wondered where the atheists and the scoffers go when something hideous happens. And it's certainly true that as elect exiles we don't fit in this world but the question is which one is out of phase, us or the world? And understand this, if no one around you has ever felt the least bit of discomfort with where you are as Christian, you might wonder which kingdom you're aligning yourself with. Understand, it's legitimate to ask yourself am I really one of God's elect or am I not? Peter himself said, he said: *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.*

And the critical question is, okay, I'll ask the question but how am I going to know? Well, I certainly hope you know by now that simply going to church and saying the sinner's prayer, even being baptized, that doesn't make you a Christian. What is it then that marks you out as a person who's one of God's elect? Well, it comes down to another important word that we find here in Peter's greeting. Our fourth word is the word "obedience." He says: *To God's elect, exiles scattered who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.*

Understand what God is saying here. What he's saying is that if you are chosen, if God chose to intimately know you ahead of time,

if he's sanctified you through the Holy Spirit by doing exactly what Ezekiel 36 says, if you've been sprinkled with clean water and cleansed through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, then something very specific will be the result. And again we find it in *Ezekiel 36*. He says: *I will give you a new heart, and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* See, obedience will be your new default drive.

If you are the elect of God, you have been chosen, as Peter says, for obedience to Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't mean you suddenly become a robot. But what it means is that God has done a major spiritual procedure on you, he's given you a spiritual heart transplant. See, that old stony heart that you had before, that had no desire for obedience. But this new heart that God has installed in you, this heart is a vastly different heart, it's a heart that is tuned and pointed towards obedience. After this God-given surgical procedure, obedience becomes a deeper pleasure in your life than whatever sin and sickness that occupied it before.

I mean, it's almost as you could imagine a physical heart transplant taking place, I mean, you wake up the next morning with something brand new, something different inside you, and from that

moment forward we begin this new process of living, you encounter our final word from Peter and that word we call "sanctification." He says: *We have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.* And we all know it takes an entire lifetime for that work to be completed.

See, sanctification is the process whereby God's Holy Spirit shapes and molds us into a unique image of Jesus Christ. You can image Christ like nobody else can. You do it uniquely. And sanctification is the process of God shaping and molding you into that image. And this will to obey which is the product of sanctification, it starts the moment you get your new heart. Now, are you perfectly obedient right from the start? Obviously no. But the difference is now you have within you a drive to obedience that wasn't there before. Disobedience is not nearly as pleasurable nor as spiritually profitable as it was before. Obedience begins to become more and more attractive because your heart has literally been changed. Jesus referred to it as being born again because the change is literally that radical. Well, the problem is the evangelical churches have sold this heart transplant short for many years now. They basically said it's yours for the asking and it costs nothing but that's simply not true.

You see, at the beginning of this message I pointed out the great difference between religion and a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you're only interested in religion like that poor sap on the billboard, well you want the best deal you can get, you want the biggest bang from the smallest buck, you're looking for a way to work out your life so that you can have Jesus Christ and his kingdom and the world and its kingdom. But you can't have them both. If you're God's elect then God won't let you be satisfied with a little bit of both.

See, God's elect are not some group of people who are fat and sassy, having won life's greatest lottery. They are people driven by the Holy Spirit to love God and to demonstrate that love by obedience. Jesus Christ made it crystal clear in John 14. He said in *John 14:15-24* over and over again that if you really are one of his, if you really do love him, then obedience will mark your life. This is what he said in verse 15: *"If you love me, keep my commands."* In verse 16, he said: *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."* In verse 23, he said: *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."* In verse 24, he said: *"No one who does not love me will not obey my teaching."*

Understand, Jesus is not giving us a list of non-negotiable demands here. He's not giving a new set of imperatives, new things that

you have to do. No, instead he's describing a new series of indicatives, things that indicate what a Christian genuinely is, things that are the new natural for those who are truly the elect of God. I mean these are the attitudes that born again Christians naturally have. God is saying if you love me, it will be completely normal and natural for obedience to be this new default drive within you and the reason is simple. Again, it comes from Ezekiel 36. The Spirit of God within you will impart to you a will to obedience. That's the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. There's no thought of working a deal here because there's no deal to work out when both parties are committed to the same ends and goals and that's the glory of God. They both share the same commitment because God's elect are God's own possession. And there's no place for pride in God's elect because nothing they did or could do got them there in the first place. I mean, they understand that they were fallen, hell-deserving sinners who exist as testimonies not of their goodness but of God's grace.

And to be sure, we still sin because we're still sinners but inside of us the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience compels us to hate our sin and long for the power to obey God's commands. It literally becomes our new passion.

And so we have in this one little paragraph five words that describe what a born again believer is. He says: We are elect, expressly selected by God as a special possession forever. We are foreknown, chosen according to God's foreknowledge. God chose to know us intimately ahead of time. We are exiles. Because we are chosen of God, we will never fit in this world's system. And again, if you're completely comfortable within this world, you got to ask yourself, why is that?

Finally, we are sanctified. We are strangers chosen by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, God's Spirit changing us into the image of Christ. And again, the minute you were saved God began that work of sanctification in your life and it's going to take an entire lifetime to complete it, but it's happening right now. It's ongoing right now. I mean, if you have no desire to grow in your knowledge of and passion for obedience to Christ, you've got to ask yourself, why is that?

And finally, we are obedient. We are elect exiles foreknown by God for the sanctifying work of obedience. And being careful to obey God's rules is our new default drive. And not that we're perfect at it but it becomes our new passion. So if obedience isn't our passion and disobedience is, again we have to ask ourselves, why is that?

You know, Peter covers an amazing amount of territory in that one little paragraph. The ultimate question that we have to ask ourselves this morning is basically one of addresses. What we have to ask ourself, is Peter's first letter properly addressed to me? Have I been expressly selected by God as his special possession forever? Have I intimately been known by God since before creation? Have I been set apart by the Spirit of God to move me to follow his decrees and be careful to fulfill his laws? Do I have a passion for obedience? Well, if I can't honestly say yes to those questions and that truly, truly bothers you, well maybe God is speaking to you right now. Maybe he's telling you that this religion stuff is for the birds. Maybe he's telling you that you need to start a relationship that he's been patiently waiting for right now. See, the good news is that God is ready to welcome you with open arms.

Now, if you do know that you fit Peter's description, I have a letter for you from the apostle Peter. This is what he says. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia as well as Orange County, Pike County and Sussex County, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to*

you. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you and praise you that we are a gift given by you to the Son so that we may exist to bring glory to God. That's who we are and that's why we're here. Father, I thank you for giving us that knowledge. I thank you for your Holy Spirit making it clearer and clearer to us each day. I pray for each and every person in this room who has that sense, that understanding, that drive to obedience, and if there's any in here that are wondering where it is, I pray that you would be touching them right now and saying, let's get real. I pray for that grace, I pray for that sense, I pray for the insight and wisdom that we all need not just to have that grace but to share it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.