

RECOGNITION OF DIVINE DNA

... taking a look at how God sees church

1 Peter 2:4-10

WEFC May 17, 2009

The CHURCH – God’s People – is often criticized from outside and inside ... both correctly and incorrectly.

Many want to change the Church’s DNA, its very nature, its look.

There is a push to remove God’s likeness from it and give it a make-over. Their end goal is to get it to look like a toothless, spineless, wilted, all accommodating group that stands for nothing and affirms everything.

Though often detached from society, missing opportunities, the church is still God’s idea and His choice agent to work into a society skeptical of the power of Christ.

The Church is “human”, but it was made “in God’s image” with a DNA that clearly points to God’s design.

In the midst of one opinion after another, what are God’s people to look like? What is it to do in a society that has taken it off the front lines?

(The Church is not merely ONE person, but a large group of people ... one that cannot be ignored for its sheer size. That is why society has to react to it. If we were only individuals, we could be dismissed.)

Each of us wants to know ...

- who we are
- what is our purpose
- where we are going

1 Peter 2 is written to keep us from having such an identity crisis.

It reminds us we take our cues not from society, not from the latest trend or fashion, but that we lock into our original DNA..

It is easy to get frustrated with the Church and pack in any involvement we may have with it. We can label it as an irrelevant relic.

God sees it to be very different.

Key Thought:

The church is to be able to look into a mirror and recognize the likeness of Jesus Christ.

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1. The Church takes on the appearance of that at which it looks

Children, upon seeing a older person drive in a particular way, dress in certain clothes, make a good move in soccer, attempt to imitate.

As we move up in age, we dress like “cool” crowd.

We see ... we like ... we try to look like “them”.

God desires His church to see ... like ... and then look like His Son – Jesus Christ.

The intent of the opening words is brought out if we put it this way:

As you keep on continually coming to Jesus, the living Stone ...

Whether we forget what He looks like, or we get caught up in other things, to make sure we have the right appearance, come across properly, we need to keep on continually coming to Jesus Christ.

As we hang around Jesus, stay in His company, we begin to talk, act and look like Him.

We, His church, human flesh and blood, are to look like Jesus' twin.

Weekly, as we gather here, we want to CONTINUALLY BRING BEFORE OURSELVES BEFORE JESUS ... not because we are uncreative and have nothing else that could be said, but we are concerned that we do not lose sight of Jesus ...

Looking at Him makes us most relevant in a skeptical society.

1.1 The fact that some do not like Him is not a problem

But not everyone is impressed.

There is no unanimous verdict on Jesus at this time.

He is rejected by many, accepted though, by God the Father Himself.

There are a pile of people remain unimpressed with Jesus, God the Father considers Jesus to be His specially selected Savior ... One that is highly honored in His presence.

... and the Church is to be tuned in most attentively to God's assessment of Jesus.

... because who He is, we are to become.

Jesus is not into a popularity contest.

Whether people like Him or hate Him, He wants us to stand with Him, not because He is unable to handle the criticism, but because in Jesus we get the clearest picture of reality.

1.2 Our “model” is clearly seen

Since Jesus is **THE LIVING STONE** ... His Church is made of many who look like Him. As **THE LIVING STONE**, the Church is made up of look-a-likes ... other **LIVING STONES** ... who take on His likeness, constitution, heartbeat.

Jesus must always remain prominent within the church.

1.3 A key feature: togetherness through sacrifice

This part we need to etch into our being:

⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Mixing word pictures, instruction is given as to what should be happening in the Church.

For Church to be a “spiritual house” indicates that we need some structure, organization.

We are “a holy priesthood” ... that is, people who work on behalf of others.

An Old Testament priest (different from how people understand priest today) offered sacrifices. That was a priority item on their job description.

The work was directed primarily to God ... getting people into a place where they could meet with God.

The Church looks at its best when it sacrificially works together to please God by highlighting His Son, Jesus.

This means that the Church has to ...

- **mingle with society and take it on the chin from society**
- **be sensitive to God's interweaving of lives within** – a very good thing
- **be one-up on society in concrete and convincing behavior without looking down on society**

... which means that we spend for society but don't expect returns; we help where society is afraid to go because they may lose their life or health, but we aren't here to protect our lives, but give them for others.

- **primarily not worry about society's assessments of it, but God's**
- **exists for reasons beyond itself**

The point of the Word of God is this:

This is not primarily an individual effort. This is a group matter.

God wants us to learn how to get along with each other so that we all pull in the same direction.

He wants us to give up personal agendas for His "group" cause.

If society is to get the picture of who God is, the best way is to make certain that that picture includes God's Church.

What we look at, we become.

... and that is why continually looking at Jesus ... together ... is so important.

The Church is best God's image when it is on the one hand selfless, on the other, Christ-honoring.

In his book, *Uh-Oh*, essayist Robert Fulghum wrote of the summer in 1959 when he was working at the Feather River Inn near Blairsden, California, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Just out of college, he was hot-headed and free with his opinions. One week he grew angry because the employees were being served the same thing for lunch every single day – two wieners, a mound of sauerkraut, and rolls. Furthermore, the cost of the meals was deducted from the employee's checks. On Friday night he learned that the same fare would be on the employee menu for two more days.

Fulghum, who had already taken a strong dislike to the hotel's owner, vented his anger to the night auditor, a man named Sigmund Wollman.

I decided that I have had it up to here; that I am going to get a plate of wieners and sauerkraut and go and wake up the owner and throw it on him. I am sick and tired of this and insulted and nobody is going to make me eat wieners and sauerkraut for a whole week and make me pay for it and who does he think he is anyway and how can life be sustained on wieners and sauerkraut and this is un-American ...

The whole hotel stinks anyhow.

Fulghum continued his tirade, ... the horses are all nags and the guest are all idiots and I'm packing my bags and heading for Montana where they never even heard of wieners and sauerkraut and wouldn't feed that stuff to pigs!

Fulghum raved on for twenty minutes, delivering his monologue at the top of his lungs with much profanity.

Sigmund Wollman, who had spent three years in a German death camp during World War 11, just sat, watching and listening. Finally he said, "Fulghum, are you finished?"

"No, Why?"

"Listen, Fulghum, Listen to me, listen to me. You know what's wrong with you? It's not wieners and kraut and it's not the boss and it's not the chef and it's not the job."

"So what's wrong with me?"

"Fulghum, you think you know everything, but you don't know the difference between an inconvenience and a problem. If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire --- then you got a problem. Everything else is inconvenience.

Life IS inconvenient. Life is lumpy. Learn to separate the inconveniences from the real problems. You will live longer. And you will not annoy people like me so much. Good night!"

And with those words, he waved the young man off to bed.
The Church is not self-absorbed.

It takes it's cue from THE LIVING STONE – Jesus Christ.

He lived so differently, consistently, that people who were a part of society noticed.

He knew what was important ... and He was not self-absorbed. That is why people have listened to Jesus ... and they will listen to His church – when we are seen as **living stones, ... being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

Just how crucial is Jesus in this process?

⁶For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," ⁸and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message— which is also what they were destined for.

Everything hinges on Jesus ... everything.

God looks at all matters in how it reflects on Jesus.

A person's eternal destiny ... is dependent on what they do with Jesus.

Just what the Church, we, should look like is now explained.

2. The Church is to be recognized as God's "right hand"

Between God and His Church is to be seen a connection that is so obvious that it cannot be missed.

The Church is not intended to be a religious club, a spiritual community center or a biblically based support group.

It is to be seen as God's classy, people movement.

⁹But 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. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

2.1 God's classy, people-movement

Four descriptive phrases or titles are given to the Church.

This four descriptive phrases are not new. They are old stuff, but what is new is that in the past they referred to the nation of Israel, but now they were being transferred to a new body – God's Church.

... implying that God's Church would now takeover where the Nation of Israel had failed ... in being adequate explainers of God to the world at large.

Exodus 19:5-6

³ Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said,

"This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:

⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

God has temporarily set aside Israel as His prime people-movement. Today, that people-movement of His is the Church.

Four descriptive phrases or titles are given to the Church:

- **Chosen People**
- **Royal Priesthood**
- **Holy Nation**
- **People Belonging to God**

Political words are used, but politics – as we understand them – are not the point here.

God wants His people, wherever they be, to understand that life as an individual is incomplete.

I, on my own, is definitely not the ideal.

None of us, by ourselves, was intended to pull it off for God.

God is establishing a classy, “people-movement” where the people take their cues from these realities:

- **Chosen People**

What may appear to be a group of people thrown together, is anything but.

Each person in the Church is God-drawn.

There are no “mis-fits” in God’s family.

There is an inclusiveness inside ... those that God has drawn are to be fully received.

... a recognition of God’s sovereign choice.

- **Royal Priesthood**

What is normally separated in society is glued together in God’s realm – privilege and work.

Normally, royalty has servants who do the work. Those in high places give orders.

In God’s Church the high places are at ground level or below.

Those who are the King’s Kids work on behalf of others.

That is how the King’s Kids are recognized – they are the one’s who have their sleeves rolled up – not walking around in royal

robes, but coveralls – making sacrifices – so that those who are not with them might see the richness of reality found in Jesus.

Chris Heuertz is the international director of Word Made Flesh, an organization that helps the world’s poor. In his book *Simple Christianity*, Heuertz writes that one night in particular stands out in all his world travels.

While walking the streets of Calcutta, Heuertz and his companions—Josh, Sarah, and Phileena, Heuertz’s wife—stumbled across a person lying under a filthy, fly-infested blanket. A three-foot trail of diarrhea was making its way toward the gutter. It was obvious to anyone passing by that the person under the sheet was either dead or dying. Heuertz writes:

My pal Josh tapped the body on the shoulder to see if the person was dead. The body moved. Josh pulled the blanket down from the face that it covered to see a helpless young man, maybe twenty-two years old and visibly stunned by our approach.

As soon as he realized we were there to help him, he began weeping uncontrollably. A crowd gathered. He continued to cry. We didn’t have much to work with, but our friend Sarah grabbed a bottle of water and some newspaper. She began cleaning the young man, wiping the diarrhea off with the newspaper and rinsing him with the water.

We asked him his name. Tutella Dhas. He was lost, afraid, alone. His body was a leathery-skinned skeleton, and his bulging eyes accentuated the shape of his skull. He kept crying.

We tried to get a taxi, but none would stop. The crowd grew. No one wanted to help. Two more friends happened to be walking down the street just then, and they were able to find a taxi. They took Tutella Dhas with them and headed off to Mother Teresa’s House for the Dying. Phileena, Sarah, Josh, and I stood there in disbelief.

I lifted my head and caught sight of a church and its sign less than five feet where we found the dying Tutella Dhas. The sign read, "All are welcome here."

People from the church watched as we helped Tutella, yet the gate remained closed.

Christopher L. Heuertz, Simple Christianity (IVP, 2008), pp. 61-62

- **Holy Nation**

Any country that we examine today, is corrupt ... some more than others, but all are in the same boat.

God wants His church to be different.

A large group that operates on the basis of the Charter of Godly Rights – where the “rights” are God’s, not our wrongs glossed over.

... where the ideals are not merely given lip-service, but are followed to a degree unsurpassed anywhere else in society ... where truth is truth, where right is followed, where sin is not covered, and where sin is encountered it is wisely dealt with and removed.

This ought to be “**group life**” at its best.

- **People Belonging to God**

But we are not just independents getting together in a “cooperative”.

The Church is a people who are God-owned.

The joyful reality that personal surrender places me under God’s absolute authority, while squelching my independence, does result in security, release and honest to goodness happiness.

The Church is to live by God’s higher standard.

When the Church so operates, then we “explain” God accurately. People get to see God’s heart is not so soft that it is standardless, and that His truth is not merely arbitrary and harsh.

They see that the Church is God’s “right hand”.

This is God’s classy, people-movement.

An impeccably dressed Englishman was standing in line at an airline reservations count when a pushy woman, slapped down her ticket on the counter, and demanded an upgrade to first class.

The gentleman picked up her ticket and pressed it back into her hand with the response, ““Madam, first class is not a boarding pass. It is a way of life.”

God’s classy people then take the next step.

*The Church, recognized as God’s “right hand”, declares **the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

2.2 Refuses to be silenced by a censoring society

Society does not appreciate having its conscience aroused. It does not want to hear that one day it will have to face the God of the Universe and account for its actions.

And so while society rejects Jesus, His church “praises Him” for one prime reason ... His salvation.

Because God noticed our need, because He did something about it in the Person of His Son, the Church sings a God-Tune ... it publicizes his goodness even when censored and when it is politically incorrect ... the music gets one spiritual toe tapping.

Tony Campolo was in New York - is a joyless place.

I got on an express elevator; it was full of dead, joyless people. They were just standing there with attache cases. And when I got on I did my thing. I waited for the door to close - you know how people stand and look at the numbers. I thought I might bring a little joy. I smiled at everybody and in New York they can't handle that. You see, they kind of backed up away from me.

And I said, "Lighten up guys. Lighten up. We're going to be traveling together for quite a while. What do you say we sing?"

And the suckers were so intimidated by me, they did. I mean you should have been there. At the 70th floor this guy got off with me. I said, "Are you going to the same meeting I am going to?"

He said, "No, I just wanted to finish the song."

That's what praise does.

2.3 A position received and retained by ... what else ... but grace

The church is filled with people who do not deserve to be in it.

¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The initiative to bring us into His family, comes from God.

He pulls His Church together from all over.

We, who had no natural “in” with God are called. We are given what is most certainly not earned, never deserved, impossible for us to put together ... God gives it to us so that we can be fully received into God's Church.

Society looks at the church and sees it as optional, putting it in the category of “take it or leave it”.

What society rejects, God has chosen to use to do His work ...

It is not our individual efforts, but the Church's collective response that honors Him.

... and as we go into the next paragraphs, specifics are given to on how society is to recognize the Church.

IN CONCLUSION

God has created "a look alike" ... a group of people to represent Him ... His church.

Far from perfect ... a matter Peter addresses later on ... does not minimize the truth that the Church needs to look like Jesus.

God is not so interested in ME, as He is interested in ME WITHIN HIS CHURCH.

It is not just ME, but US.

God wants us together to reflect Him.

One evening, my oldest daughter came home from a Sunday evening worship service. She had been deeply affected by the experience and in response had written on a piece of paper,

"Help me not to be okay just because everything is okay with me."

Nancy Ortberg, Looking for God (Tyndale, 2008), p. 31

Life is not a personal game of solitaire.

To have impact, we must have character.

The Church only stands tall in society when it has the life of Jesus Christ pulsating within it.

It recognizes that passages like **1 Peter 2** are not God's theory, but what is to be lived out on the hospital ward, boardroom, or kitchen.

It is willing to take abuse from society, because it knows that it is right ... and in the end ... will win.

It hangs in there, with character.

Once a year at my (Tony Campolo) church, it's an African American church in West Philadelphia, we have Student Recognition Day. And the young people, one by one come to the rostrum and tell what they are doing.

And as these young people tell what they are studying what they are becoming, the old folks in my congregation just sit there and go, "My, my, thank you, Jesus. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes." And there's a groan and there is a moment that makes music that is even more beautiful than the music we heard today, the music of joyful moaning of God's people.

And when they were finished my pastor looked down at the kids and he said, "Children, you're going to die, you're going to die" - that's a good thing to tell college kids, because they don't think they're going to die.

He said, "You are going to die. They are going to drop you in a hole. They are going to throw dirt in your face and they are going to go back to the church and eat potato salad." Ain't it the truth.

He continued, "When you were born you were the only one that cried, everyone else was happy." Not important but what is important is this: "When you die will you be the only one that is happy and everyone else will cry?"

Good question. Depends on what you live for. Did you live selfishly, where did you live out the dreams of Jesus and serve other people?

"When it's all over what will you leave behind ...? Are you going to leave titles or testimonies?" Oh **that's good**, that is really good.

And he did with only my pastor can do; he swept through the Bible in five minutes. He said, "There was Moses, and there was Pharaoh. Pharaoh had a title, a good title: Ruler of Egypt - that's a good title. But when it was over that's all he had. He had the title, but Moses had the testimonies.", that's good.

He said, "There was Jezebel and Elijah the prophet that she was going to destroy. Jezebel had a title; it was, Queen Jezebel. There's a good title, Queen. But when it was over that's all she had. She had the title but Elijah had the..." it gets to you, doesn't it? I'll give you one more shot, just one more, so get ready.

"There was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Good title, King. Good title, King. King Nebuchadnezzar, he was going to throw Daniel to the lions, but when it was over that's all he had. He had the title of King, Daniel, Daniel had the testimonies."

The Church ... not many titles ... but may it be the place that has the testimonies ... of what God has done and continues to do.

Key Thought:

The church is to be able to look into a mirror and recognize the likeness of Jesus Christ.