



SERMON GUIDE

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Published by:
The Jenkins Institute
thejenkinsinstitute.com



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Week 16

A Peculiar People

J O V A N P A Y E S

What His Family Looks Like: A Peculiar People

Introduction

1. Question: Are we *peculiar*? Let me ask this question from a different angle: when you hear the word peculiar, does odd come to mind? How about strange... a fringe awkwardness? Would you say that the people that know us—know you—as a Christian would think we are *peculiar* in this way?
2. Here we meet a well established trope about Christians in society: we're odd balls religionists who do not live in the real world, but on the fringe of it because we're strange. Unfortunately, we give lip service to this mischaracterization because we often affirm being "peculiar" and "separate" from the world; however, what we mean when we follow the Bible's definition about being a peculiar people is quite different.
3. We are not odd for oddity's sake. We are not a living museum of *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* That is not the biblical claim! In fact, we may stand out, we may be culturally fringe on certain matters, and we may have fellow believers who are indeed odd (creepy, oversaved, or reclusive); however, in the Bible God calls his people *peculiar* when he is speaking of his people as his *treasured possession*. It is an affirmation that we are in fact highly prized by God as his treasured people.

Transitional Words: It is because there is so much confusion about what it looks like to be God's peculiar people that we need to return to the deep well of God's word and dig afresh. At a time when the worldview of our youth and rising generations hold a more secular worldview while simultaneously holding an anemic spiritual one, we need clarity of what it means to be God's treasured possession.¹

Sermon Body

- I. Main Point #1: The first place our thoughts need to go for meditation is the Old Testament, as it demonstrates Israel as the *Treasured Possession* (*se'gullah*) of God.
 - A. Exodus 19:5

¹ "In America we live in a *Jesus-haunted culture* that is *biblically illiterate*. Jesus is a household name, and yet only a distinct minority of Americans have studied an English translation of the original documents that tell us about Jesus, much less read them in the original Greek. In this sort of environment, almost any wild theory about Jesus or his earliest followers can pass for knowledge with some audiences, because so few people actually know the primary sources, the relevant texts, or the historical context with which we should be concerned," Ben Witherington, III, *What Have They Done With Jesus?* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 2; emphasis added.

1. When God had accomplished bringing Israel out from Egypt and brought them to Mt. Sinai, God's words to Israel emphasize the saving act of God which delivered this people to himself. Here the Lord explains that this relationship will continue on certain conditions:
2. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my commandment, you shall be my treasured possession [peculiar treasure, KJV] among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6a ESV).
3. Despite the fact that the Lord possesses "all the earth" by right of creation, Israel would be the Lord's treasured possession by commitment to obeying God's commands. Israel is not odd, but rather Israel is his divine treasure among the peoples of the world.

B. Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18

1. In Deuteronomy, Moses farewell exhortations find their significance in preparing Israel for the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to give them the land promised to Abraham. "As far as Israel is concerned, the relationship [with the Lord] calls for utter and unconditional loyalty."²
2. The Lord reiterates his words from Mt. Sinai, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6). This selection had nothing to do with the size of their population; it was matter of the Lord's love and faithfulness to Abraham. This steadfast love is not extended to "those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (7:9).
3. It is because Israel is the Lord's "chosen" and "treasured possession" (14:2) that the people are forbidden to mourn for the dead as the cultic practices of Baal would seemingly require (Lev 11; 1 King 18:28). Additionally, the children of the Lord God, the Lord's "treasured possession," had a different pattern to live by even in what they ate (Deut 14:3–21).
4. As Moses concluded his second discourse, he declared "today" (i.e., the covenantal day of allegiance, 26:17) "you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments" (26:18).

² Peter E. Cousins, "Deuteronomy," *The International Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed., ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 257.

5. The phrase “treasured possession” is pregnant with the covenantal loyalty of Israel expressed in obedience to God and the Lord’s steadfast love toward Israel expressed in fulfilling his word and oaths.
- C. Overall Takeaway: The OT phrase is a magnificent status statement of Israel as God’s *treasured possession*, acquired by his saving acts, and to whom God offers covenantal steadfast love provided Israel lives out its own loyalty to God expressed in holiness and faithful obedience to God’s commands. This very fact is made into a call for praise in the Psalms (135:1–4).

Transitional Words: As the church is the expression of God’s kingdom as the Israel of God (Gal 6:16), it is not surprising this language of God’s treasured or special possession is found applied to the church in profound ways. The first place we begin is at the table of the apostle Paul, the converted church persecutor, former Pharisee.

II. Main Point #2: The Apostle Paul expounds to Titus a letter which is to aid him in service of God’s elect who are found in Christ on the Island of Crete (Titus 1:1–4). The elect must be formed by grace of God (2:11).

- A. Whatever the problems Titus faced on Crete were, Paul establishes that God’s people are submissive to God’s will for the good of the church witnesses in a skeptical society.
1. The overseer must but be “above reproach... so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine...” (1:7–9).
 2. Titus is to teach others “what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1), as are the older men and women (2:2–3). The outcome is so that Christians may lives submissive to God’s will as they “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (2:10).
 3. Paul is, therefore, focused on the moral and spiritual character of the Christians in Crete, since Cretans are stereotyped as distrustful liars (1:12). Christians must overcome the moral skepticism by sincere godly lives (2:12).
- B. Paul piles together a series of redemptive terms and actions of God as an anchor from which to make his appeal in Titus 2:11–14.
1. The grace of God appeared for the purpose of training to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions.
 2. By this grace salvation was offered to all humanity for those believers to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives.

3. This conversion process was embedded with a hope to anticipate the glorified Jesus Christ who is our great God and Savior.³
 4. The saving act which brings about a redemption through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus was to “purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (2:14).
- C. Overall Takeaway: Paul echoes the OT passages of Exodus and Deuteronomy and equates Jesus as God, and the church as his possession he redeemed and purified; the church obedience and zealous of the good works taught in the sound doctrine assumed throughout the letter.

Transitional Words: As we see, Paul affirms the same covenantal, redemptive, ethical relationship between Israel and the Lord is now the basis for Jesus and the church. We conclude with Peter’s exhortations for the Christians in Asia Minor (1 Pet 1:1–2) who are faced with the challenge of living a new life as the people of God.⁴

- III. Main Point #3: The Apostle Peter exhorts the Christians of Asia Minor to live moral lives fed by the word of God as they develop into a spiritual community of mature believers in the analogy of the temple and priesthood of Israel (1 Peter 2:1–5).
- A. The success of the young church is based on the their obedience to the word of God (2:6–8).
 - B. The Gentiles of the church are God’s people because they received mercy and brought into the kingdom as the Lord’s people (2:10).
 - C. This is a narrative of migrants who become full participants among the people of God. Who were once estranged are now insiders: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9).
 - D. This is language of *covenantal acquisition*. Like Acts 28:20, the church is acquired by the blood of Christ. Like, Exodus 19:5–6 and Isaiah 43:20–21, the Christians have been acquired by the

³ Wayne Jackson points out how the language of this text, following the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar, identifies “our Savior Jesus Christ” with the phrase “great God.” As a result, this passage affirms the deity of Christ. Paul has in mind Jesus as our God; cf. Before I Die: Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus (Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications, 2007), 348.

⁴ Paul Achtemeier, “1 Peter,” Harper’s Bible Commentary, ed. James L. Mays (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1281.

redemptive acts of God now blessed by the marvelous light of God's mercy.

- E. Overall Takeaway: Living as members of the people of God means that we belong to God, regardless of being Jew (the insider) or Gentile (the outsider); however, life in the church of God means we have the obligation to obey the word of God and mature through its nutrition.

Transitional Words: When we think biblically about being God's peculiar people, we must never forget we are his peculiar treasure, or as modern translation render it, special treasure or possession. We are his by virtue of his redemption—the God's side, and we are his by our full commitment to obey his word—the Christian's side. We are peculiar because we exclusively align ourselves with God and his teaching in a world that does not believe his word.

Conclusion

1. What this should mean to us as Christians is that as God's people we experience his love, his loyalty, his covenant, his redemption, his unmerited favor. We have what we could not gain on our own, fellowship with God through redemption. Let us praise him for it (Psa 135:4).
2. We must not, however, think this phrase is a passive concept. Being God's special treasure means we have moral, spiritual, and ethical obligations. In short, we submit and obey God's word. Let us catch the spirit of obedience, to know God's word, to do it, and to teach it (Ezra 7:10).
3. Finally, let us not be thought of as odd because we are overzealous (oversaved), because he seek to be odd of odd's sake. If we are going to be thought of as strange, may be because we known for our faithfulness to God that we will not join in on immoral behavior (1 Pet 4:1–6).
- 4.

Sermon Helps

Introduction Ideas

1. Asking a question can be very helpful to invite the audience into the thought world of your message. Perhaps it would be helpful to create a few mental pictures or use slides to invite a thought exercise. For example, offer a picture of religious people dressed in counter-cultural dress like the Amish in there horse drawn carriages, Nuns in habits, etc. Or, use mental pictures of Ned

Flanders from *The Simpsons*, or another contemporary mainstream religious representation, and ask: why do they stick out so much in society? Are they odd? What is the purpose of standing out and being different in our society? Are they different just to be different? Are we different just to be different? Is that what Christianity is all about, being so different (*oversaved!* see below) people don't want to be around us?

2. Laying the theological foundation—the big picture—of the concept of God entering into covenantal fellowship with Israel and describing the process of making Israel his special treasure and possession would be very helpful for explaining the purpose of passages like Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9–10.

Illustrations

1. In the irreverent, anti-traditional-family animated series, *The Simpsons*, the Ned Flanders family are the poster-boy church going family of Springfield. Homer Simpson is often represented as an “irredeemable” type of person who champions irredeemability over reformatory value of church and religion. Homer refuses to be “saved” by religion and it's all for the better. It is standard faire for *The Simpsons* to elevate the irredeemable and marginalize the religious. Though the show emerged on the “family hour” in the late 80's along with *Rosanne* and *Married with Children*, the show's shock value has ebbed to being part of the standard worldview. This only magnifies the marginalization and mischaracterization of Christians and religion in media.⁵ Media elevates the fractured family with irredeemable values—like *Family Guy*'s Peter Griffin—and devalues those with traditional religious values who are predominately portrayed as politically conservative White Christians—the Flanders of America, and by extension the “Karens” of the world.
2. The stigma Christians often face is equating *peculiar* with *odd*. Comedian Michael Jr., in a comedy special hosted in a church, did a set about “oversaved” Christians: “I didn't want to be a Christian... for a long time because some Christians are creepy... You ever know someone who was *oversaved*?... You can't even have a regular conversation with them: ‘Man, I'm thirsty, you thirsty?’ ‘*Thirsty for the Lord!*’... ‘Hey, I lost my keys, can you help me find my keys?’ ‘*You need the keys to the kingdom!*’ ‘I didn't drive a ‘Kingdom,’ I drove a Toyota.’... You could be oversaved and not even know it. A couple indicators...: if you don't mess around with computers because they got a *cursor*... if you rebuke a vacuum

⁵ Lisle Dalton, Eric M. Mazur, and Monica Siems, “Homer the Heretic and Charlie Church: Parody, Piety, and Pluralism in *The Simpsons*,” *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, eds. Eric M. Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2000), 231–47.

because it's a *Dirt Devil*.”⁶ Michael Jr. was simply poking at an extreme “Christian” stereotype.

Quotes

1. Dan Winkler asks if Christians are as *odd* as the fictive half jack rabbit, half antelope, Jackalope. Winkler goes on: “Are we the wild-eyed, uniformed activists portrayed by the media? Are we the ‘social oddities’ that are crafted and projected by Hollywood’s prejudice? Are we the counter-cultural bigots the amoral interests groups of our nation say we are?”⁷
2. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215) near the close of his letter to the Romans prayed: “Finally, may the all-seeing God and Master of spirits and Lord of all flesh, who chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him *to be his own special people [eis laòn perioúsion]*, grant to every should that has called upon his magnificent and holy name faith, fear, peace, patience, steadfastness, self-control, purity, and sobriety, that they may be pleasing to his name through out high priest and guardian, Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and majesty, might and honor to him, both now and for ever and ever. Amen” (Michael W. Holmes). The 1912 Harvard Loeb edition translates *laòn perioúsion* as “a peculiar people.”⁸

Applications

1. Remember to emphasize the acknowledgment that we as Christians are the object of God’s covenantal desires. God wants fellowship with us and he has done everything possible in Jesus to make this a reality, since we cannot establish this relationship on our own. We are completely dependent on God’s redemptive plan. We are possessed by God through the union with Jesus “in Christ.” Christians affirm, “I am God’s possession with the redeemed!”
2. It is essential and proper to praise God, to thank God, to live in gratitude to God, for making us his people through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. A problematic reality is Christian apathy, and it often breeds the contemporary problem of “deconversion.” Christian Apologist Sean McDowell has observed that he has never known a person “who fell away who had a grace experience that they are a sinner in need of divine forgiveness as

⁶ Michael Jr., “Oversaved,” from the *Laughing on Purpose Special* at the Gateway Church in Southlake, TX, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48kHDuCwy5U>.

⁷ Dan Winkler, “A Peculiar People,” *Spiritual Sword* 30.1 (1998): 43.

⁸ 1 Clement 64; Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), emphasis added; Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers* (1912; repr., Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005).

they came to faith.”⁹ Christian need to be absolutely clear about their need for the means by which God has made his possession—the sacrifice of Jesus. As a Christian, we should commit to living a life in the church that shows my gratitude for God’s grace that saved us and made us his.

Word Study

1. In the 1611 King James Version, “peculiar” is the gloss used to translate the Hebrew *segullah* in Deuteronomy 14:2 and the two Greek words in the NT (*peripoíēsis*, 1 Pet 2:9; *perioúsios*, Tit 2:14). As noted below, the words translated “peculiar” do not carry the “disparaging tone” of strange, eccentric, or odd, as it does today. In the seventeenth century, the word still meant “belonging to the individual...one’s very own” which are rare meanings used today. For this reason, the majority of recent translations—including the New King James Version—have abandoned the word “peculiar” for alternative phrases reflecting *possession* and *special treasure*.¹⁰ This adjustment by modern translations is an excellent illustration of the principle of the best possible translation is that which gives the modern reader clear access to an accurate understanding of the original text’s meaning.¹¹ This is not to suggest “peculiar” should be abandoned altogether, but it must be acknowledged that in the English language the word finds itself more in the realm of strange in the worst sense. The church must emphasize the sense of *possession*, as *God’s special treasure* acquired by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).
2. Using the KJV as our basis, the following word studies may prove helpful:
 - (a) In the OT, the word *segullah* has a base meaning of “personal property.”¹² It appears eight times as peculiar/special plus: people (Deut 14:2, 26:18), treasure (Exod 19:5; Psa 135:4; Eccles 2:8), chosen (Deut 7:6), or proper good (1 Chron 29:3), my possession (Mal 3:17). God’s treasure always refers to Israel (cf. Psa 135:4), while monetary references are of royal treasures (1 Chron 29:3; Eccles 2:8); therefore, it refers to something so *exceedingly prized* its acquisition (God’s agency) took careful

⁹ Sean McDowell, “Progressive Christianity,” Lecture, Talbot School of Theology (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2021).

¹⁰ Martin H. Manser, ed., *King James Bible Word Book* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2002), 280.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (1979, repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 90.

¹² R. D. Patterson, “sgl,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laid Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 2:617.

perseverance to obtain.¹³ The Greek texts of Exodus and Deuteronomy use the phrase *laò- + perioúsi-* five times (Exod 19:5, 23:22; Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18).

- (b) In the New Testament, the words translated “peculiar” appear six times (*peripoíēsis, perioúsios*). (i) Titus *alone* uses the phrase *laò- + perioúsi-* in a clear allusion to the covenantal language found in the Greek Exodus and Deuteronomy for “his [i.e., God’s] “chosen people” who do God’s works and live holy (Tit 2:14).¹⁴ This is the clearest linguistic connection to the OT notion of God’s people being his especially prized people (*segullah*), but now applied to the redeemed church which was accomplished through the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus (Tit 2:11–14).¹⁵ (ii) Of the five instances of *peripoíēsis* in the NT (1 Thess 5:9; 2 Thess 2:14; Eph 1:14; Heb 10:39), only the context of 1 Peter 2:9–10 parallels the “possession” concept of the OT and Titus. In the NT, the noun is predominately used for possessing *things* of salvation. The noun *peripoíēsis* appears three times in the Greek OT in non-covenantal texts (2 Chron 14:12; Hag 2:9), except in Malachi 3:9, as a translation for *segullah* when the Lord makes rebellious Israel his possession once again.¹⁶ The verbal appears three times, the parallel idea of OT usage is found in Acts 20:28 *emphasizing the acquisition* of what is possessed, the church by the blood of Jesus (cf. Luke 17:33; 1 Tim 3:13). When Exodus 19:5–6 and Isaiah 43:20–21 are compared, the allusion of *covenantal acquisition or obtaining* is clear. This background informs then the reading of 1 Peter 2:9–10 as both Jew and Gentile Christians experience the same blessing reserved for Israel.¹⁷

Object Lessons

1. It is remarkable to see when someone “gets it,” when the light bulb turns on in the heart and mind of person so that their consciousness is pricked into action that is unequivocally an

¹³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 688; William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 305.

¹⁴ George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (1992; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 328–29.

¹⁵ Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 317.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 115.

¹⁷ Allen Black and Mark Black, *1 & 2 Peter* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1998), 64–65; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 115.

expression of their commitment to a cause. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) was an atheistic skeptic and professor of English literature until he was persuaded by the apologetic work of George MacDonald.¹⁸ In his book, *Mere Christianity*, he relates the kind of overwhelming commitment that comes to those that become Christians: “If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all.”¹⁹ Lewis is one of the most well-known Christian authors of the last century, and his legacy is seen today. Whereas today on a secular university campus an outspoken Christian professor is exceptionally rare due to academic reprisals, Lewis maintained his commitment to his Anglican faith in the face of criticism and shunning by colleagues at Oxford and Cambridge.²⁰ What will happen to us when we *get what it means* that we are God’s possession, redeemed by Christ? Will our apathy finally disappear?

2. Being God’s possession as a holy people zealous for doing his will, means we live in a community with a single shared worldview (or meta-narrative). The story of redemption is a fully woven tapestry in which God in Christ is giving us the human story that unites us all. It is not a matter of individuals being saved, God is redeeming the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18–19). The grand narrative of our lives is we are all the object of God’s reconciling work, though some will reject it. For those of us in Christ, however, we experience what it means to be the possession of God. It means that every Christian is given communal access to God through the body of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer affirmed, “It is certain that there can be no fellowship or communion with him except through his Body. For only through that Body can we find acceptance and salvation... through... baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”²¹ Bonhoeffer illustrates that the communion in Christ is the result of the incarnation of Christ to redeem humanity, and to unite with humanity in baptism. “Only when we know Christ in this way is our being with him the source of grace.”²² For this reason, the incarnation leads to Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice to accomplish reconciliation, whereby Christians experience the living promise in the memorial of the Lord Supper that our story ends with reunion with God at the coming of Christ.

¹⁸ Todd Temple and Kim Twitchell, *20th Century People Who Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 170–74.

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (1952; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1960), 75.

²⁰ Temple and Twitchell, *20th Century People*, 174.

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, R. H. Fuller and Irmgard Booth (1959; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 239.

²² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 240–41.

Invitation Song Ideas, etc.

1. “Redeemed” (1882) by Fanny Crosby, “Redeemed” (1916) by James Rowe.
2. “In Christ Alone” (2001) by Stuart Townend, “Jesus, Hold My Hand” (1933) by Albert E. Brumley.