

Knowing God: Formality And Customs (Part 7)

Who We Are

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 15-Feb-03; Sermon #597

Matthew 10:34-38 [Jesus said] Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that takes not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me.

I'm going to use these verses as a launching pad, but the sermon actually began coming together as I was reading through Matthew 24, and especially verse 13 where Jesus said, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

I noticed how much conflict Jesus spoke of during "the time of the end," and from there my mind drifted to this verse. It did so because the world has been sold a bill of goods regarding accepting Jesus. The story goes, that when one does this, "peace" breaks out all over. But brethren, that contradicts what this verse and many others say regarding life and its activities following conversion. The reality is that conflict continues. In fact it may even intensify. We become constantly aware of our spiritual conflict with Satan that didn't even exist in our minds prior to that. We are in a war with this world and with our nature, and there even may be an increase of conflict within the family and in the marketplace.

What "truly accepting Christ" does is provide us with an assurance that our sins are forgiven, and that there is hope for the future. It doesn't take away conflict, but it does provide us with a far better way to confront it and overcome it.

In Matthew 24:12 Jesus said that a major cause of us having to be concerned about conflict and enduring is because "the love of many shall grow cold." Love's opposite is sin. It is sin that creates conflict, and sin has a way of pressuring us to break down even the very best of our intentions. It's like a weight bearing on us constantly, persuading us, making us weary of the burden of constantly resisting it until we succumb under the constant conflict with it, and we yield to it.

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God has given us gifts to enable us to resist and to overcome sin with far greater strength and endurance than before conversion. There is strength to be found in a multitude of gifts that can give us an additional edge if we know and if we use them. Those gifts are ***who and what we are***.

One of the most distressing aspects of sin and its conflicts is that it reaches out to envelope innocent parties into its deadly web. Sin attracts human nature in us like a magnet is attracted to steel. It was the proclivity in regard to sin that Jesus spoke of.

I don't know whether you have ever seen the movie *Jeremiah Johnson*. Evelyn and I saw it several months ago. The movie illustrates this principle vividly. Jeremiah Johnson, played by Robert Redford, was a soldier released from military service following the Civil War. He headed west because he wanted to become a mountain man. He wanted to be on his own. He wanted to trap and hunt for furs. Above all he wanted to get away from human conflict. He had been in the war, and he had had it, and he thought that if he could be alone, then he could have a measure of peace.

The movie showed that even though he was himself a peaceable man of good character and intention, that regardless of wherever he went conflict followed him, and it drew him, unwillingly on his part for sure, right into its web. He tried to be helpful to a few people he came into contact with out in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains, but those few people piled responsibilities on him. First he became a father to a mute ten-year-old boy whose mother's mind snapped after she watched her husband and older son killed by marauding Indians. He knew he couldn't leave the boy with the crazy mother because she couldn't even take care of herself, and so he took the boy with him.

He then stumbled across a man who had been attacked by Indians who stole his horses and then buried him up to his chin in sand. That man, out to get revenge against the Indians, drew Jeremiah Johnson into a conflict with those Indians. He drew them into it because the man wouldn't listen to Johnson's advice. Johnson agreed to help the man recover his horses, but he warned him, "Don't shoot any of the Indians!" Well, the man only feigned his agreement with Johnson's advice. Instead, he deliberately killed a couple of the Indians in his and Johnson's successful attempt to recover the horses. And so then Johnson and the man he rescued had to flee.

During their fleeing it brought them into contact with another friendlier Indian tribe who were enemies of the Indians that were chasing them. While they were there they were pretty safe, and Johnson was grateful. But Johnson, unwittingly, out of gratitude gave the chief such a great gift that the chief felt obligated to give him one better, and so the chief, after much cogitation, gave him his daughter as a wife. Even if Johnson had

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

graciously refused the chief's gift, they probably would have killed him, because in their culture that would have been a great embarrassment to the chief. You don't out gift the chief. So now he had a wife, and a son, neither of whom he wanted. He felt obligated now to build them a house.

The three of them worked together, and wouldn't you know it, he began falling in love with the Indian woman, and the boy as well. And then a real tragedy struck. It came in the guise of a group of men asking him to help rescue some people who were in a small wagon train stuck in a mountain valley, with winter coming just on the horizon, and time running out.

Jeremiah Johnson tried every way to get out of it, but because he knew the mountains so well he was shamed by these people into helping. He was the only one around who knew how to lead these men and become their rescuer. They put a burden of guilt on him that if any of the marooned party died, and he didn't help, he would be guilty.

What happened was that the trail to those marooned people took them, unbeknown to Johnson before they left, right across a sacred Indian burial ground that they couldn't circumvent. Johnson refused to cross it because he knew that would start a war with the Indians who would consider this a major matter of disrespect. The only other way to the wagon train was another mountain pass much farther away.

Again the rescuers shamed him into crossing the Indian burial ground by making him feel that if he didn't cross over it, he would be responsible for the deaths of all those white people. They played the race card against him. They told him to forget the heathen Indians and their religious scruples and save the Christian white people. And so with great trepidation Johnson led the rescuers across the burial ground, and the wagon train people were saved.

Johnson didn't even go all the way to the marooned party. Once they were spotted he immediately turned and raced home because he knew that trouble with the Indians would be brewing. But by the time he got there his Indian bride and the boy were already dead. With a mixture of frustration and anger and sorrow, he burned down the house with them in it. But his troubles didn't end, because one Indian after another dogged him, trying every which way to exact revenge against him for his sacrilege in crossing the burial grounds. He never had any peace from that time on, and the movie ended with the problem unresolved.

The movie is a good illustration of two major principles. The first one is that you can run, but you cannot hide. The second principle is the leavening principle that we all are so

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>) familiar with. The Bible confirms in many places that life is going to be literally filled with trouble, that conflicts abound.

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 For what has man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he has laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief, yes, his heart takes not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

Look at Job 5:7, where Job expressed something very similar.

Job 5:7 Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

Everybody knows that in a fire the sparks go up. Just as surely as sparks go up, everybody is born into conflict. It cannot be avoided.

Job 14:1 Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

Moses got into the act too in the only psalm that he wrote.

Psalms 90:9-11 For all our days are passed away in the wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath.

Let's take one more in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know you not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

You take those scriptures, and the message is clear that sin cannot be isolated to a single event, and this is a major reason why there is so much conflict in this world. The effects of sin reach out to painfully touch even those innocent of the original sin. And sin, even though we may not be guilty of it, is a wearying proposition to deal with, if only because of having to constantly be on guard against it.

Jesus said in Matthew 24 that it's going to take endurance at the time of the end because sin is going to reach the peak of the mountain, and it's going to worm its way into every aspect of society. Our culture is drowning in it right now, and we have to always be on guard, bearing with it, and watching out that we're not drawn into it.

It is primarily faith that drives both the endurance and the witness that God expects us to make during this time regardless of circumstances and regardless of what others are doing all around the persons of faith. Faith has many aspects to it that support it. I mentioned earlier that God's way provides us with a better way to meet and overcome conflict. I want to give one aspect of that way important to overcoming. It is one that is not often thought of, and it is this matter of living up to "who and what we are."

I am not saying that this living up to "who and what we are" is easy. It is **not** easy. It is very difficult. We have had handed to us one of the greatest privileges that also carries with it a very great responsibility that any human being can be given. But once we grasp our uniqueness, and the privilege, it should provide us with a stimulating reason to overcome and fulfill God's purpose.

The Bible shows that we are many things all at the same time, and that each of these characteristics should provide some impetus to do well. Each of these is an awesome privilege. Each of these is also an awesome responsibility that obligates us to God's service *because* of the privileges.

Each of us has a name, and it is by it that we are known. It identifies us as different from others, even others of the same name because most of us bear three names, and few people have exactly the same combination of name. In this group of 57 people here I am John Wells Ritenbaugh, and there's another John Wells Ritenbaugh right in this room. But I am the Third, and he's the Fourth, and so that designates each of us as a unique individual.

Our name also bears our reputation. When someone says a person's name, more than just an image of how that person looks flashes through our mind. It might be what a person is known for, like an occupation. Maybe it's an irritating habit the person has, or maybe it's a good habit. It may be something the person has done. It may be experiences you have had with that person which are carried with the person's name.

When we're resurrected we're to be given a new name, plus the name of our God, and the name of Jerusalem as well. It is by these that we will be identified as different from all others who enter God's family following Christ's return. No person should ever regard his name strictly as an appendage, but a possession distinctly his. It is the bearer of,

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and announces, one's character. Names have meanings. Sometimes God even changes people's names upon conversion, like Saul to Paul.

Even as we are to glorify **His** name, we should also glorify **our** name by means of godly character. Besides having a name that distinctly marks us, we also bear many titles, and these titles are given in the Bible and are far more numerous than most of us would guess, and they are *very*, **very** significant to our well-being.

The remainder of this sermon is going to focus on some of these titles, and just a small part of their significance. I am doing this because we must know, and **know** that we know that we bear these titles. Even though we are encompassed by many weaknesses, we are required by Almighty God to fulfill some measure of the privilege and responsibility these titles express that we are. If we do, we will endure, we will overcome, and we will make a good witness of God and His way. I have no doubt about that, and I want to arm us with a somewhat different perspective to meet the challenges of this troubling pressure- and anxiety-packed age.

I have attempted to arrange these titles in such a way as to build each upon the ones already laid. The first one that I'm going to give you is one that we are very familiar with. In fact it may be the one we are **most** familiar with, but it is a major part of this subject.

1) We are "THE CALLED"

Those of you who have been in the church for 25, 30, or 40 years may have heard John 6:44 more than any other scripture in your time in the church.

John 6:44 No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Even though the word "called" is not mentioned here, it is nonetheless the subject of what is said there by Jesus. It is our calling.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the called** according to his purpose.

We begin to get a measure of insight into the importance of this title "**the called**." Everybody wants things to go right in their life. Everybody want their life to work out **right** at the end, but "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the called according to his purpose." I can tell you right now, and you know this, that we cannot love God ***until*** we are called. It ***precedes*** loving God.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

It is ***the calling*** that opens the door a crack to the Tree of Life and to all the good things that lie ahead. Prior to this time we are just one of the herd?the five or so billion people running toward destruction. It is the calling that opens the way into God's presence, to justification, sanctification, and glorification. Now how many have been called of God from the time of Adam, I do not know, but I do know that compared to all who have lived that it is a very tiny percentage.

Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give ***you*** the kingdom.

That term "little flock" is not translated quite right in the *King James Version*. It is a double diminutive. It should literally read, "*little, little flock*," indicating that those who are called into the church is a mighty small number. I'm now 70 years old. Let's just suppose that 10 billion people lived on earth since I was born in 1932. Now if God called just one percent of them, there would be 10 million people called into the church. I think that my one percent is high. We are part of a very small, very privileged group of people called to be made ready for the Kingdom of God, prepared because of the calling which enables us to be in God's presence.

2) We are "THE CHOSEN"

Matthew 22:14 [Jesus said] For many are called, but few are chosen.

It certainly gives the impression that beyond the calling there is a *choosing* that reduces the number considerably. I'm not fully certain what "chosen" indicates when compared with "called." It seems to indicate a somewhat further refinement over "calling." Perhaps a reinforcement.

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The word here translated "chosen" is the same word that is translated "elected" in other places. But again the very wording right in the verse and in the context indicates some manner of gifting and separation engineered by God (not us) and that we are the beneficiaries of what He has graciously done. To reinforce that, this statement is the conclusion of the Parable of The Wedding Supper. That statement by Jesus is urging us to take advantage of the privilege bestowed upon us. **Very few are chosen.**

3) We are "THE REDEEMED"

We are called, chosen, redeemed.

We are all familiar with the story of Israel's slavery in Egypt and how God liberated them by a mighty miracle; but it was not done without cost. Egypt was devastated and broken as a world power. They witnessed the loss of their firstborn from Pharaoh on down. There was not a household that escaped some measure of pain and loss, because even their beasts were affected. Egypt paid the redemption price so that Israel could go free, virtually without lifting a hand. Israel had no army. It had no weapons to fight that kind of a battle.

Now spiritually, Satan, sin, and this world hold us in thrall. Like Israel, we cannot force ourselves free at the time of our calling. We are helpless against their onslaught, and we too have no army or weapons to fight this kind of a battle at that time. It is something that must be done for us.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.

Now look at I Peter 1:18, because he too weighs in on this subject.

I Peter 1:18-19 Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Even in the book of Revelation; it too gets into this.

Revelation 14:3-4 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne,

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

We are the undeserving recipients of God's grace through Jesus Christ who paid the redemption price with His own blood. But this title implies greater obligation to the One who paid the redemption price than any of the other titles. With redemption goes obligation.

God describes His relationship with the nation of Israel, and at this particular time He is talking about His redemption of them and what occurred as a result of that redemption.

Ezekiel 16:8 Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I swear unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and ***you became Mine***.

There is the cost to you and me for coming under the blood of Jesus Christ. When we are redeemed we become ***His***, and with that comes obligation. In Romans 6:15 Paul shows us what our obligation is.

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Now we're not under the law, and that brings obligation. ***We shall not sin***. Paul says, "God forbid," if we do

Romans 6:16 Know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Our obligation is being spelled out very clearly here.

Romans 6:17-21 But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin you became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness. What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

This very aptly describes the course set before us because we are the redeemed. This is a subject that the apostle Paul never gets very far from. The long and short of it is, even as He said in Ezekiel 16:8 that we became His, we have to understand that in the New Covenant sense He is our Master. We belong to Him. We are obligated to submit to Him in every instance of life that remains, regardless of its difficulty.

4) Because we are "The Redeemed," *We become "SAINTS"*

I think you know that the receiving of God's Holy Spirit is what makes us saints. We don't receive God's Holy Spirit until we are redeemed, and so we are ***called, chosen, redeemed, saints***.

I Corinthians 1:1-2 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified [set apart] in Christ Jesus, ***called to be saints***, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, ***to the saints*** which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

We're going to go to one more scripture on this just so you get the feel of it and understand that this is no little thing.

Colossians 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, ***to the saints*** and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is no little thing. This title appears in the introduction of many epistles, and it indicates *one set apart for holy use*. We become Christ's, and He begins to use us to carry out responsibilities. That's what a saint does. The "set-apart" ones carry out responsibilities. We already saw that the responsibility is to resist sin and to overcome it, but it goes further than that. He is our employer, and He sets us in the body as it pleases Him to carry out responsibilities. You can attach I Corinthians 12 to this where Paul talks about the body. God sets us in the body as it pleases Him, and gives us responsibilities to carry out. This indicates a personal hands-on relationship with the One giving the orders and doing the placing. As chosen vessels, we are to carry out responsibilities before men in Christ's earthly temple.

Look at I Kings 5:12-18 and we'll see an example of this.

I Kings 5:12-18 And the LOORD gave Solomon wisdom as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together. And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy. And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burden, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains; beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred which ruled over the people that wrought in the work. And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

What we have here is a picture of a king. In this case it was Solomon, but I want you to think "Christ." He is using physical resources to build his temple. It is a type of Jesus Christ using us to build **His** temple, which is His church.

Exodus 36:2-4 And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man in whose heart the LOORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it: And they received of Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free[will] offerings every morning. And all the wise men that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made.

Exodus 36:8 And every wise hearted man among them that wrought the work of the tabernacle made ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work made he them.

Again, it's a different example, but showing the same principle where people were gifted by God in order to use them as vessels doing the work.

5) We are "VIRGINS" and we are "THE BRIDE OF CHRIST"

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

We might ask, "Is there any greater privilege that can be bestowed on one who has been forgiven and made actually part of the Bride of Christ?" What this does is carry the "hands-on" principle that we first touched on there in the previous one to its greatest degree of intimacy.

We were in Revelation 14, but I want to go back there again and read verses 3 and 4 again.

Revelation 14:3-4 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

It is right here that the privilege of working with Christ **forever** comes into being. This certainly gives the impression that we will have the privilege of being in His personal retinue following His lead in doing whatever project the Great God is directing forever. Just like a wife follows her husband, we, as the Bride of Christ, will follow Christ

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
wherever He goes in God's great vast creation—forever!

6) We are the "SONS OF Good"

I John 3:1-3 Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Did you notice what John said? He said that if we have this hope in us, we **will** purify ourselves. This is one of the things I am hoping will be the result of this sermon. All of the titles indicate what should be part of our motivation to grow, endure, witness, and glorify God's name. Something you're going to have to ask is, "Are these things worth the sacrifice necessary to achieve growth, and endure in God's way?" John thought so, and apparently he observed others in the first century church who believed the same way, and were acting on their knowledge because they appreciated what they had received—**VALUE!** ***"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself."***

This brings us to something that I have to admit to you that I do not fully understand, and I know that I don't appreciate what it means, but it is an amazing statement that the apostle John makes in I John 4:17.

I John 4:17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment [That's right now. Judgment is on the household of God. Now why can we have boldness?] Because as He [Christ] is, so are we in this world.

There is something astounding there that I cannot put into words, but it seems to be teaching us that as God looks at Christ, so He also looks at us. That's amazing! ***"As He is, so are we"—the redeemed, the virgins, the bride of Christ, the sons of God.***

7) We are "CITIZENS OF HEAVEN" and therefore already part of the Kingdom of God

Philippians 3:20-21 For our conduct is in heaven.

Some Bibles say "conversation;" other Bibles say "citizenship." The word that is translated in the *King James* "conversation" or "citizenship" or "conduct" is the Greek word *politeuma*, and it is the word from which we get our English word "politics." Therefore "citizenship" is the correct translation.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our ******citizenship****** is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Colossians 1:9-14 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet [fitting] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us [transferred us] into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

We are already legally citizens of the Kingdom of God! Now we're going to look at what Peter had to say about this in I Peter 2:11-12.

I Peter 2:11-12 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation [meaning, at the time of their calling].

Peter says that we are strangers and pilgrims. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we have already been translated, (that is, transferred) into the Kingdom of God. So legally, that is where our citizenship resides, and that is why Peter can honestly say that we are "strangers," which can also be translated "aliens." We are aliens in a nation that is not where our real citizenship resides.

And then Peter says we are "pilgrims." A pilgrim is a person who is on his way,

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

journeying somewhere. He has a goal in mind. He is not just wandering, but he is passing through a land that is not his, and he is headed toward another land. And so our being citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven has made us aliens even though we are still living in the land that we were born in.

I want you to notice Peter's appeal. Despite the fact that we have received this great honor of being part of the greatest and most powerful kingdom ever to exist, we cannot throw our weight around and live a despotic lifestyle as some ambassadors do. We are to live according to the standard of the Kingdom of God.

Again, not long ago Evelyn and I watched the movie *Roman Holiday* starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck. In that movie she played a princess of a foreign nation visiting Italy, while representing her country. She detested the rigorous scheduling and the responsibility of her position. Her life always seemed to be beyond her own desire to have fun like everybody else seemed to be having.

One evening she was given a sedative by the doctor to calm her and cause her to go to sleep. Before the sedative took effect, she managed to steal her way out of her apartment and go into the city streets of Rome. To passersby she appeared to be drunk. Gregory Peck happened to come along, and he knew who *she* was because he had been to a press conference where the princess was to be interviewed. She didn't know who *he* was, but he saw the opportunity to get a very good story, and so he took her to his apartment, put her into bed and allowed her to sleep it off.

Then during the day he became her guide through Rome, and she had a Roman holiday. But at the end of the day she knew that she had a difficult choice to make. She could return to her calling as a princess, or give it up. The two were just not going to mix. She made the right choice. She went back to her responsibility as a princess.

This privilege that has been given to us does not give us the privilege to practice that "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" principle. We must represent our nation with the highest degree of righteousness. This is because we bear the name of God. That's what we were baptized into, and we must not bear that name in vain.

8) We are the "ISRAEL OF Good"

Galatians 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule [the rule of the new creation] peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

We are His personal possession. Notice the word "**of**." It indicates possession. We are His personal possession, and what is important to us is *the new creation*. That is what God is doing in us. The physical things are of no regard whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised. They stand for the whole round of physical things. But our citizenship, and the fact that we are now the personal possession of God as the ***Israel of God***, means something very great to those who understand.

Ephesians 2:11 Wherefore remember that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, ...

The word "Gentiles" is sometimes used to indicate somebody who is unconverted, who is not of the nation of God.

Ephesians 2:11-14 Wherefore remember that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and ***strangers*** from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

One of the things that being part of ***the Israel of God*** means is that the promises made to Israel—made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—now belong to the church, and we are the ***new*** creation—the creation of a ***new Israel***. This will become more important as we go along.

9) We are "HEIRS OF THE PROMISES"

This dovetails right into the fact that we are now the Israel of God.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

Because one must have eternal life to inherit the promises, we are also heirs of salvation and co-heirs with Christ, and He is going to inherit the entire earth at the very least.

Romans 4:13 For the promise that he [Abraham] should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

10) We are the "BODY OF CHRIST," We are "BRANCHES," We are "THE CHURCH"

John 15:1-5 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

Because we are directly intimately connected to Christ, becoming like Him is a reality. That is what this means. No plant produces anything foreign to it. An apple tree cannot produce oranges. You can tie this into the principle that is given in Matthew 7:15. Because we are connected directly to Him we will **become** like Him, because the branches produce exactly what the vine produces, or what the vine dictates.

11) We are "FIRSTFRUITS"

I Corinthians 15:20-23 But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

James very clearly declares that we are firstfruits.

James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

We are the first step in God's grand purpose, and as a result and special blessing, we are called to a better resurrection. In Hebrews 11:39, after giving a brief summary of these people who were standouts in the area of faith, it says:

Hebrews 11:39-40 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

God has provided some better thing for us. What this involves is **preeminence**. We are the **firstfruits**, and it means that we are on the ground floor of everything that will happen endlessly into the future. When you combine this with us being the Bride of Christ and going everywhere that the Lamb goes, we are given **preeminence** in the outworking of God's great plan.

12) We are "a TREASURE" to God.

Malachi 3:16-17 Then they that feared the LOORD spoke often one to another: and the LOORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LOORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the LOORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him.

What does this one indicate? It indicates that we are something that God **guards**.

The previous point indicated preeminence, but this point indicates **protection** to go along with the preeminence. Very much could be said about this even to the point of **fleeing**. Because we are a treasure to God, it's the way He looks at us as something precious that He will guard in time of need.

13) We are "THE BELOVED"

Daniel 10:11 And he [an angel] said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto you, and stand upright: for unto you am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
trembling.

Daniel 10:19 And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto you, be strong, yes, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for you have strengthened me.

Matthew 3:16-17 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Now how does this apply to us?

Ephesians 1:6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved.

As unreal as it might seem, we are in the same category as Daniel and Christ.

Let's conclude this sermon by turning back to Matthew 21:42-43.

Matthew 21:42-43 Jesus said unto them, Did you never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

This was said to a people who were given very special privileges no other nation in the history of the world was ever given. In Amos 3 God says that directly. "You only, of all the nations, have known Me." But here is Jesus saying that they failed to live up to their obligation that those privileges imposed. In like manner, we have been given even **greater** privileges as *the virgins*, as *the called of God*, as *the Israel of God*, as *the inheritors of the promises*, and so the question remains for you and me, ...will we live up to our obligation?

Now in all of this there is both privilege and responsibility, and more than enough reason to apply ourselves to resist and overcome the pulls of the burden of this world's sins, making the very best witness to endure to the end.