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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“A CHOSEN PEOPLE” ~ First Peter 2:9-12

“Reject!” “Loser!” “Scum!” “Worthless!”

Haven’t we heard venomous words like these?

Maybe they were spat at us by a human assailant. Maybe they were vomited into our minds by the devil or our own selves.

I was taught to say “**Sticks and stones may break my bones, / but words will never hurt me.**” It was a lie!

Evil words *do* hurt. The pain can be tolerable or agonizing. The injury can be temporary or life-long.

{April 26, 2007} According to the Harvard Mental Health Letter “**children who**” are targeted for “**frequent verbal mistreatment**” are prone to “**physical aggression... delinquency,**” and post-traumatic stress disorder like soldiers returning from war. They run “**a significantly higher**” than normal “**risk of developing unstable, angry personalities, narcissistic behavior, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and paranoia.**” The data shows that “**verbal abuse ... [has] as great an effect as physical**” abuse and “**nondomestic sexual molestation.**”

Degrading words are especially harmful when we internalize them, when we come to believe they are true. Internalization gives substance to hateful speech. For example, potentially brilliant people who are called “stupid” and internalize it proceed to think, speak and behave stupidly. In effect, they *become* stupid.

Evil words spoken by sinful creatures wound and destroy and make us less than we otherwise can be. We have been on the receiving end. God have mercy on us, you and I have also spewed them at others. That is terrible news!

The great news is that good words spoken by our Holy Creator have far greater power to heal and to create and to make us more than we otherwise can be!

□ Please turn with me to First Peter 2:9-12.

The evidence suggests that Peter’s first readers are ① mostly Jewish Christians ② who used to live in Rome. ③ They were evangelized either when they travelled to Jerusalem for Pentecost or when a missionary came to Rome, but then ④ they were expelled from Rome with other, traditional Jews and forced to settle in Asia Minor.

{1 P 1:1} Their accent, ethnicity, cultural traditions, moral values, and biblical faith mark them as {TNIV} “**exiles,**” {NIV} “**strangers,**” {CEV} “**foreigners,**” and {NASB} “**aliens**” in the eyes of the local Gentiles. And since they confess Jesus as Messiah traditional Jews see them as disruptive dupes or hell-bound heretics.

{Jobe} Pagans and traditional Jews alike label these Christ Followers as worthless, unwanted weirdoes. They are “**slandered and maligned,**” and their neighbors tear them down them with harsh words.

■ It is to these ridiculed believers that Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, announces in verses 9-10: “**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out**

**of darkness into his wonderful light. Once 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.”**

{Mt 22:14; Jn 15:19} Each human being is a creature of inestimable value; still, **“Many are invited, but few are chosen.”** The Lord Jesus says to his people, **“out of the”** entire **“world” “I have chosen you.”**

{1 Co 1:27-28} This is grounds, not for pride, but for gratitude and humility. God has not singled us out because we are better than others; to the contrary, God chooses **“foolish things...to shame the wise... weak things...to shame the strong... lowly things... despised things – and...things that are not...so that no one may boast before him.”**

People who look at us from a worldly point of view can be excused for scoffing, *[with sarcasm]* “Wow. Aren’t you ‘special’?!”

Yet the All-Seeing, All-Hearing, All-Knowing God looks at us in perfect wisdom and says, **“you are... special,” my “special possession.”**

Not only so, Sovereign God has chosen us for a special *purpose* (or rather, special *purposes*).

{1 P 1:2; Ro 8:29} We are chosen to be **“the people of God”** – not just a people group, but a family: **“For those God foreknew he... predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters.”**

{1 P 2:5; Ro 12:1; Heb 13:15; Php 4:18} We are chosen to be **“a royal priesthood”** who **“[offer] spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God [the Father] through”** his Son, worthy

sacrifices of our bodies, our praises, and our deeds of compassion, mercy and justice.

{Jas 2:5; 1 P 1:1} We are chosen to be **“a holy nation,”** for God **“has...chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world” “to inherit the kingdom”** in the future and to manifest it in the present. Even while we are **“exiles scattered”** across the earth we are not without a country.

There are two overarching realities here.

✈ 1<sup>st</sup>, Election (the state of being chosen) requires divine initiative and human response.

- First Peter 1:2 states that 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 sprinkled with his blood.”** If we are chosen, it is the Holy Trinity who acted first.

{Php 2:12b-13} Nevertheless, election does not simply happen to us: we are responsible to live into it. Hence, Paul advises, **“continue to work out your salvation”** – salvation is a fruit of election – **“with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act...”**

✈ 2<sup>nd</sup>, God chooses us to be so that we will do.

{Eph 1:4-5a; Jn 15:16} The Father **“predestined us for adoption to sonship through”** his Son (that is being) **“and appointed [us] to go and bear fruit”** (that is doing).

{Jn 15:8, 6} Chosen people live like the chosen. Those who consistently don’t live like the chosen have not been chosen (at least not yet). **“This is to my**

**Father's glory,"** says Messiah, **"that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples,"** my chosen ones.

As an aside, this is *not* grounds for judging the spiritual status of other people. ("Anyone can see that I am one of the Chosen; but you? I don't think so!") It *is* grounds for *self-evaluation*. Are we living as the Elect? If we don't see the evidence, it is time for some deep soul-searching.

All this is to the glory of God. Foolish, weak, lowly and negligible though we naturally are, in Christ we are **"chosen," "royal," "holy,"** and **"special"** so we **"may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light."**

■ On to verses 11-12: **"Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."**

● In 1:14-16 Peter called us to holiness on the basis of our spiritual DNA: **"As obedient children" "be holy in all you do" "just as he...is holy";** for **"it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"**

📖 In relation to God, holiness is whole-hearted obedience to his perfect law. In relation to other people, holiness is *αγαπη* [agapē] love expressed in thought, word, and deed.

● In 1:1-2 Peter called us to holiness on the basis of the means of our salvation: You **"have been chosen... through the sanctifying [the consecrating] work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled**

**with his blood."** (In the O.T., sprinkling with sacrificial blood was an act of purification.)

● In 1:17 Peter called us to holiness on the basis of the coming judgment: **"Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."**

{Ro 8:29} Now Peter calls us to holiness on the basis of self-care and Christian witness.

■ {Jas 1:15; Mt 7:13-14} Verse 11: **"Abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."** Gluttony, lust, greed, selfish ambition, bloodlust, and similar desires promise life but **"[give] birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."** **"Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction... But small is the gate and narrow the road"** (the road of holy obedience and love) **"that leads to life."** That's self-care.

■ Concerning Christian witness, in verse 12 we read: **"Live such good lives... that" "the pagans" "may see your good deeds and glorify God."**

Anyone can be "holier than thou," and almost anyone can adhere to a set of rules; but consecration that energizes us for radical obedience to God and love for others (including our enemies) – that points to divine presence and power. Hence, it is a powerful witness.

Notice the prophesied outcome: that **"they may ... glorify God."** We are **"chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession,"** (verse 9) in order **"that [we] may declare [his] praises."** Glorifying the Living God is our

reason for being, and our holiness accomplishes that purpose.

{Php 2:10} And notice the timing: **“they may... glorify God on the day he visits us,”** at Christ’s return. Only then will the great words finally be fulfilled: **“at the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

But notice what isn’t said! Peter does not say: that **“they may see your good deeds”** and praise *you*. Obedience to God and *αγαπη* love are not means to social acceptance. Actually, we learn in First Peter 4:4, the pagans **“are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.”**

{Is 53:3; Heb 12:2} Messiah also **“was despised and rejected.”** **“For the joy set before him he endured”** it; likewise, **“God chose [us]”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14) **“that [we] might share in the glory of our Lord,”** and holiness is part of that glory. This is what it means to be God’s chosen people.

■ In conclusion, I invite us to read verses 9-10 in unison, substituting *we* and *us* for the pronoun **“you”**: **“But [we] are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are the people of God; once [we]**

**had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy.”**

This is the word of the Lord.