

metro congress, churches taking them in turns according to the roster

- Convention - every 2 years, organized by whoever will take in on - metro, Tassie, Albany (if nobody takes it on it obviously will not happen)  
- Easter weekend - an Albany or West Albany congress in the years Convention isn't on (so every 2nd year; it therefore follows that each of the Albany churches will be organizing a congress every four years).

What the manual would include:

- Roster
- Previous congress details:
  - Speeches & speakers (to prevent double up, or give ideas after ~10 years has passed)
  - Catering ideas & figures
- Entertainment ideas
- Guidelines - not with the intent to restrict originality but rather to prevent congress standards from going too far down hill (e.g. suggestion that at least 2 papers are held)
- Marketing tips - when committees should start advertising etc to ensure that most people are able to make plans ahead of time
- Other necessary information / interesting facts
- e.g. Public Liability Insurance

All with the purpose that congresses and conventions are organized and held to assist the youth in further serving and glorifying God's holy Name.

Meeting organised/attended by:

Contender Reps  
Frank Janssen (Contender)  
Rose Vermeulen (Contender)

Armadale  
Bruce Huizinga (Contender)  
Carl Bruning

Byford  
Rose Vermeulen

Darling Downs  
Clayton VanDerSchaaf  
Amanda Kobes

Kelmscott  
Belinda Schoof  
Arend Witten

Rockingham

Derek VanDelden  
Shelley Dekker  
West Kelmscott  
Frank Janssen  
Alyce Sibum

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."  
This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.  
It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

Editorial Board

Eric Dekker	Bruce Huizinga
Arend Witten	Rose Vermeulen
Frank Janssen	Rosanne Numan

Editorial Address  
3187 Albany Highway Armadale 6112  
eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

The deadline for materials to be used in the next issue is  
04/07/04

*"contending earnestly for the faith ..."* Jude :3

# Editorial

It has now been a few months since West Kelmscott hosted Easter Congress. The congress was well attended and the feedback that was received indicated that those present had a pleasant and enjoyable weekend. The speeches which were held by Mark Hoogerdijk are now being made available to all the youth via this special issue of the Contender.

Many people had lots of ideas throughout that weekend, and so to publish the articles now will serve as a refresher and a reminder of the commitment we had made. How many clubs have started working on the suggestions? Or was the congress just another weekend where we said a lot, felt good about what we said, and then returned home and did nothing about what was discussed. Does this happen because of laziness or excuses such as, "I haven't the time or the ability"? Or, "I want to do my own stuff"? Or, "I think that I act as a Christian daily and portray the light my own way"?

On the other hand it was good to see interest in the proposed congress schedule. This can be found at the end of this edition

and/or is available from the youth club committees of each church. Please pass on your thoughts to them about the proposal and other matters concerning congresses and other events, so that when another meeting is held those issues can be discussed.

It is also a welcome sign that Rockingham has already started to advertise for the congress to be held on the Queen's Birthday weekend (1st - 4th October). I hope they receive as much, if not more, support as West Kelmscott received. I hope this weekend too will be well attended and enjoyed by all the youth.

May our God bless us in our efforts to honour and praise His name, and bless the tools that He has given us to be able to strengthen our resolve to live for Him, that as youth of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia we too may be lights in the world.

- Frank Janssen

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# Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3-5

Here you are gathered together as youth of the Free Reformed Churches in Western Australia for your annual Easter Congress.

Naturally, much of your time will be spent socialising with each other; catching up with those you haven't seen for a while. Yet this time is also special for another reason. The organising committee asked me to speak to you today and tomorrow on a topic of my own choosing. Well, in fact, perhaps the topic was just given to me in a natural way, this being the time of year that we remember the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this that I would like to focus on in my speeches to you. In doing so, we will take a closer look at what Peter writes in his first letter. In today's speech, we will concentrate on 1 Peter 1: 3-5, while tomorrow the focus will be on 1 Peter 2: 9-10. I will try to bring some practical issues out in my talks to you, but you will also realise that it is important to understand what Scripture says, as well. I hope that later on in the group discussions some of the practicalities will be further expanded on.

The text we are focusing on at present begins with a call to praise. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" The reason? Because He has caused us to be born again to a living hope and to an inheritance reserved in heaven for us. If we stop to think about what this text is saying, to meditate on it, then the greatness of God's love should lead us to praise Him, to glorify Him. To a certain extent, we should not even concern ourselves with the doctrinal truth presented in this passage. Rather, we should let the magnitude of what God has done for us through His Son sink into our hearts. It should cause us to stand in awe and amazement! Now, of course, it is important first of all to believe that God did send our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to die for our sins and to rise again from the dead. If we don't accept these as basic truths, we would not be able to proceed any further. But it is not enough simply to know that this is what God has done. We've got to make it our own. I fear that too often we know a lot about the Lord Jesus Christ, but we don't really know Him. We know who He is, and what He has done, and we even know He has done it for us. But is this real-

ly alive in us? Knowing about Jesus Christ isn't going to do anything for us. Only really knowing Him will give us salvation. The goal that Peter sets before us here is to worship God. In doing so, we need "to see God's great reality with our minds, and feel God's beauty and wonder with our hearts, and speak and sing God's greatness with our mouths" (Piper, 10 Oct 1992, 2). You see, it is with our whole selves that we must come before God. It is with mind, heart, and mouth. It's believing, feeling and accepting, and proclaiming in thankfulness.

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## **'We should let the magnitude of what God has done for us through His Son sink into our hearts.'**

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The first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever" (The Shorter Catechism with scripture proofs, 1). And really, that's what this passage of Scripture is all about. We are called to glorify God and we are also told that we will receive an inheritance, which includes enjoying God forever. This is all possible, because God has shown His great and profound mercy to us in the saving act of our Lord Jesus Christ. This same truth is expressed by the apostle Paul in Romans 5: 8, where we read, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Again we should be profoundly awed and amazed at the truth expressed here. While we were lost in our sins, working against God instead of with Him, He showed His love and mercy in Christ to us. We can't let the magnitude of this fact escape us.

We are called to bless or praise God, because in His abundant mercy He has caused us to be born again. God's great mercy is the source of our new birth. There was no merit in ourselves that led God to regenerate us. Paul writes of this truth in his letter to Titus: "But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man

our task. They are! But not all of such work is done in an organised way. Some, if not most, of it comes spontaneously in daily situations as they arise.

I will give you one example of how the youth can be involved in organised evangelism work. In a university in Canada, a group of youth who were members of the local Canadian Reformed Churches organised themselves to do some work on campus. They called themselves the 'Areopagus Project'. They got their name from Acts 17, where we read about Paul preaching in the midst of the Areopagus in Athens. He preached to them about God and called them to repentance. What this group of students did was to set up a table in a main part of the university and spent time there handing out literature, Bibles and information to fellow students. They spent time talking to them about the Christian faith, about the goodness of God in their lives. I don't know if any of the other students ever became members of the Church in that city, but I do know that those students were proclaiming the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

These are all just a few examples of how we are to proclaim God both within and outside the Church community. There are also many other ways, some of which you might be able to discuss and share with others in the group discussions. From all of this, let us remember who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. May God continue to use our identities to make His identity known throughout our own community and to the ends of the earth.

- Mark Hoogedyk

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# Congress

## Proposal for the Coordination of Congress & Conventions April 2004

A meeting was called by representatives of the Contender Committee recently to address some concerns (mostly administrative) that many people seem to have regarding Congresses and Conventions. Representatives from each church's youth club committee attended the meeting. During this meeting we discussed current concerns and possible ways to deal with these issues. Below you will find the outcome from the meeting. Our intention is to get this proposal accepted by the Club Committees and from there move forward to having a clearer understanding between us regarding the organization of these events.

All feedback, input or questions are welcome.

### Current situation

- Confusion regarding who organizes the congress
- Common problems occur with each congress, and without communication occurring between the various committees no opportunity is given to learn from each other's experiences
- Albany & West Albany each currently have to organize a congress every two years, which can become a bit much.
- There appears to be drop in attendance over the years.

### How to deal with this

- Make up a 10 year plan roster (this has been made and will be distributed amongst the churches and maintained by the Committee referred to below)
- Set up a central congress/convention committee (perhaps linked to the Contender committee). Their task would merely be to maintain rosters, manual, etc. No task relating to specific congresses would be given to them.
- Set up an ongoing manual (to remain in the possession of above committee after the congress is over).
- Organize congresses & Conventions in the following manner:
  - Queen's birthday weekend (Sept/Oct) - a

all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."

We need to work with each other and watch over each other, so that we remain in the light and in the service of the Lord.

I said earlier that the church community should be a safe environment for all of us. Sometimes, however, it is not. The church community does not just mean who we are on Sunday when we are in church listening to God's Word being preached. It means how we interact with each other also during the week. How do we interact with each other? Do we show God's love to our fellow members? Is God's name glorified in our words and actions to others? If we are students at high school, do we give in to peer pressure and ostracise fellow students who we think are not as good as we are? Do we exclude them from our 'in crowds'? Do you think that God is glorified in situations like these? What does this kind of thing do to those who are on the receiving end of our mean words and actions? Do you know that there are some people who are treated disdainfully and excluded their whole life right from the moment they start primary school all the way till they reach the last years of high school? Do they experience what it means to be part of the communion of saints day by day? This can also happen within our Youth Clubs. And it continues to happen also among adults in regular church life. If it is going to change, it has to change earlier than later. What can you do as a high school student to stop this sin of exclusion? Negative peer pressure has to be changed into positive peer pressure. We have to say as young people and also as adults that we won't tolerate it anymore. We won't be involved in the exclusion of others; we won't be party to it any longer. We will do so, because the victim does not experience God's love in our actions to him or her. We will together seek to glorify and honour God in our words and deeds. I use this situation as an example. But even if you are not a high school student, I'm sure there are similar situations that you can apply the same principles to. This is something that needs much attention so that we may say that God's praises are proclaimed within the communion of saints.

We also have a task outside the church

community. Since we have been shown the love of God in that He called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, we should have the desire that others might experience the same thing. Many of us will have regular contact with unbelievers at university or in the work force. We might even have some contact with the people in our street. We have to reach out to them and share with them the wondrous work God has done in our lives. This is not always an easy task. We don't want to be different from the people around us. We want to blend in and be semi-invisible. Sometimes we could say we are a bit embarrassed when asked if we are Christians or when we are asked which church we go to. In situations like these, are we not being ashamed of Jesus Christ? We have no need to be. We don't have to be scared or embarrassed about being different. If we act in such a way, we are acting out of character. We are not showing our true identity.

The first way in which we can make God's identity known to others is by our walk of life. Others should be able to see from the way we live and talk that we are different. They should be able to see that we are Christians from how we live. If you go to Church on Sunday dressed nicely with your Bible and Book of Praise in your hand, and the rest of the week you use foul language and act meanly to others, your neighbours will notice. Living in such a way will not be a proclamation of the praises and mercies of God. If you live inconsistently in your work place, your co-workers will notice and they won't be led to praise God through your actions. Your walk and talk have got to match. So by your walk of life you may win others for Christ.

We also need to reach out to others. It is not just about living a Christian lifestyle in an ungodly world. You also need to tell others about God and about what He has done for you. You should want to, because you feel so rich, so loved, so joyful. It really should just spill over from us. If it is living in our heart, it should be vocalised from our mouths. This doesn't mean that we necessarily have to be involved in organised mission or evangelism work. It can simply mean that whenever and wherever God places people on our path that we take up this opportunity and spread God's fame. I don't want to say that mission work and evangelism work are not

appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3: 4-7). But what exactly does it mean to be born again? How does one become born again? Let's look at the second question first. Peter gives us insight into this in the passage we are focusing on, as does the text just quoted from the letter to Titus. Our being born again involves all three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father shows His great mercy to us by sending His Son into this world to die for us. God the Son sacrificed Himself to pay for our sins. He died on the cross and rose again from the dead, so that we might receive pardon for our sins. When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in our hearts to renew us after God's image. In 1 Peter 1: 3, we are told that our rebirth is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In His mercy to us, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And Christ's triumph over death makes our new birth possible. Without this, we would still be dead in our sins.

Now we can look once again at the first question posed: What does it mean to be born again? First of all, it has nothing to do with physical birth, as Nicodemus thought according to the account in the gospel of John. There is a similarity between our physical birth and our new birth in Christ, and that is that we had nothing to do with either one. They are both done to us. Just as we had no say in our physical birth, so we also did not cause our new birth. So many evangelical Christians in the world today believe that they have a part to play in their second birth. They think that in some way they choose it and they cause it. But our text makes it abundantly clear that we don't make the choice for it and we don't cause it. Peter says, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "has caused us to be born again." God did it! And our mouths should explode open with praise for this great and merciful work in our lives! All glory belongs to God! We were dead in our sins, but "God, who is rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2: 4-5). We become a new creation in Christ (see

Eph 4: 24; Gal 6: 15; and 2 Cor 5: 17). We were rebellious, but God worked repentance so that we could come to a knowledge of the truth. We had no faith, but God drew us to Himself and saved us by faith, which also is not our own doing, but rather it is a gift of God (see Eph 2: 8f). Our being born again is totally and completely a work of God. Our new birth is God restoring us to how He created us in the first place, for He "created (us) good and in His image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness" (Lord's Day 3, Q&A 6). What can we do, but praise and thank Him!

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### **'Words by themselves don't produce hope.'**

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Peter continues on by stating what it is that flows from our new birth. He says that we are born again to a living hope. As a result of Christ's resurrection and consequently our being born again, we may now possess a living hope. However, a lot of time has passed between Christ's resurrection and our new birth here in the present. How is it possible that Christ's resurrection has this affect on my life? Peter gives us the answer in verse 23 of this chapter, where he says we have been born again through the word of God, which lives and abides forever. The word of God is the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ and what He has done. So we can see that "the resurrection of Jesus does not produce hope without our hearing about it (through the gospel). Before we can beget hope in our heart we have to get the news. But the other way around is true too. Words by themselves don't produce hope. There has to be some assurance that they are true. We have to have some evidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead" (Piper, April 1981). And we have this evidence in the Word of God (see 1 Cor 15: 5-7).

How can we define hope? And how can we define living hope? Hope has in it the sense of looking forward. We hope for something in the future. In the New Testament, the word 'hope' can be defined as a "full assurance, or strong confidence that God is going to do good to us in the future" (Piper, April 1981). We don't yet experience the fullness of our salvation, for

that comes in the end. So we look to the future confidently. That brings us to the term 'living hope'. In the letter of James, we come across the term 'dead faith'. James tells us that faith without works is dead. Dead faith is barren, fruitless and unproductive. But 'living faith' and, by analogy, 'living hope' would be fertile, fruitful, and productive. Living hope is hope that has power and produces changes in life. ... So Christian hope is a strong confidence in God which has power to produce changes in how we live" (Piper, April 1981). Living hope changes our perspective on life. It focuses our attention on God and what He has done for us in Christ. It makes us look forward confidently and with great expectation to what God has in store for us in the last days. This hope "certifies to me that because Jesus bore my sins on the cross, God is for me and not against me, and it declares that this Jesus who loved me and gave Himself for me is alive and present and caring at every moment of my life" (Piper, April 1981). Having a living hope means living confidently in the care of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, trusting that He will bring to fulfilment what He has promised to us. And what we hope for is the kingdom of God.

We are also born again to an inheritance, which Peter describes as incorruptible and undefiled and unfading. We are heirs of the kingdom of God. We have a share in this inheritance because of the work of Christ. Scripture speaks of believers as coinheritors with Christ. One example of this is in Romans 8: 16-17: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Because Christ has bought us with His blood and because God has worked faith in our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are now heirs with Christ. And this inheritance is grounded in a new creation, in our new birth. The kingdom of God ultimately is the new earth, where we will live eternally with our Lord. So we could say that the inheritance is eternal life. This inheritance is so secure and we can be confident of possessing it one day. Peter says that it is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. He adds that it is reserved in heaven for us. Since this inheritance is kept in heaven for us, we can be confident that nothing here on earth can cause it

to perish. Nothing and no one can interfere with it. The Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, encourages us to look towards this inheritance when He says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6: 19-21). This inheritance is not susceptible to internal breakdown or decay, nor to destructive forces from outside. It will not only be there for a short time and then be gone. It is indestructible and eternal. Peter also encourages us by saying that this inheritance is reserved for us, which means it is in the secure hands of God. What a comfort that is! We may continue to hope confidently in the future that one day we will truly receive the inheritance.

So far we have seen God's great mercy being extended to us. We are comforted to know that He has caused us to be born again, that He gives us hope and promises us an indestructible inheritance. We know that we look forward to an excellent future that is kept safe for us. At the same time, we have to remember that Peter was writing to Christians who were suffering persecution. We know that in the years following Peter's letters the persecutions became worse and worse. And although we might not experience direct persecution, we, too, might be experiencing a lot of difficulties and hardships in this life. So Peter's readers, and we, might come to a point where we might question God as to the real chance of us ever reaching that inheritance. We don't have full possession of it right now, and who can guarantee that we will ever see the fulfilment of God's promises? It is true that God does not promise us a life free from troubles. But He definitely promises to be with us and care for us when we do go through the difficulties of life. Peter reassures us in the last verse of the passage we are discussing, that we need not worry about this either. We don't need to worry about the inheritance we will fully receive in the last time, and we also don't need to worry about making it to heaven. God doesn't give promises and then stand back and leave the rest to man. No, He makes the promises and then He leads us by the hand to the end, where we will receive the full inheritance. Peter informs us that we are

But now this, too, applies to the Gentiles, to all those who trust God and obey Him.

Another identification mark of Christians is that they are a 'holy nation'. To be holy means to be set apart for God. Because we have been chosen and because God has shown mercy to us and because He has made us His possession, He now sets us apart for Himself. We are not merely part of the world any more. We exist for God (Piper, April 1984). The people of Israel were also called God's holy nation. They were set apart from all the other nations through God's grace and mercy. This title came with a task, namely, to serve the Lord and cause His name to be honoured among all people. But because they turned away from Him, God rejected them. Now this term also applies to all those who come to God in faith. Early in his letter, Peter calls us to be holy as He who called us is holy (1 Peter 1: 15). We share God's character, because He chose us to be His own. "If you do not act in a holy way, you act out of character. You contradict your essence as a Christian. For your identity is holiness to the Lord: you are holy" (Piper, April 1984).

The final term that we need to discuss is 'a royal priesthood'. Again this term was applied to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. God, in reaffirming His covenant with His people called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Ex. 19: 6). They were called to live in service to their King. A royal priesthood is "a priesthood belonging to, and in the service of, the King" (Stibbs, 103). The benefit of this title is that we now have immediate access to God, through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, who is our only High Priest, who has sacrificed Himself for us, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father (Lord's Day 12, Q&A 31). Along with the benefits of this title comes an important task. We have an exalted, active role in God's presence. Paul calls us in Romans 12: 1 to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Also in our Catechism, we confess that we are a prophet, priest, and king. As priest, we must present ourselves a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to God (Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32).

We "are called now to minister in the presence of God. All (our) life is priestly service. (We) are never out of God's presence. (We) are never

in a neutral zone. (We) are always in the court of the temple. And (our) life is either a spiritual service of worship (Rom 12: 1-2), or it is out of character" (Piper, April 1984).

Now we know who we really are. We are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people' who have received mercy. We are the people of God, His Church, His children, His servants. It's the best identity you can have! It's all ours by the grace of God. But why have we been given this identity? What purpose does it serve? We are a special people, but we also have a special task. Peter tells us what our task is. We have this identity so that 'you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light'. What is the chief end of man? As we heard yesterday, it is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. God "has given us our identity in order that His identity might be proclaimed through us. God made us who we are so we could make known who He is" (Piper, April 1994). Let's focus on how we can do this in our lives.

In our identity as a people of God with all the characteristics described in the above, we have a special task both within the Church and outside the Church. We will first examine some of the aspects of our task in the Church. First of all, we must live godly lives and worship the Lord. We must keep His commandments and serve Him alone. The Church is also called the 'community of saints'. Our duty as part of this community is to use the gifts we have received from Christ for the benefit and well being of the other members. And we are to do this readily and cheerfully (Lord's Day 21, Q&A 55). The Church community should be a safe environment where we are able to work together, to trust one another, and shine as lights in the world together. We must be able to help each other in our service to God, to rejoice with each other in times of joy and mourn in times of sorrow. We should also be able to call each other to repentance when the need arises. We will remember that once we lived in darkness, but we have been called out into God's marvellous light. We don't want to return to that darkness, nor should we stand by and watch others slip back into that darkness. Paul says in Ephesians 5: 8f, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in

believe in Him and accept the work He has done for us are now God's chosen people. In God's amazing grace, He has chosen some to be His special people. We can do nothing else but thank and praise Him for His amazing love.

Once we were not God's people. Peter says in verse 10 that we are those 'who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.' This also was said of the people of Israel in the days of Hosea the prophet, except in the reverse. Hosea, you will remember, had to marry a harlot as an example of how the people of Israel had turned away from God. Hosea and his wife had three children. The second was a daughter, whom God told Hosea to call 'Lo-Ruhamah', which means 'No Mercy'. Why? Because God said, "For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away" (Hosea 1: 6). Hosea's third child was a son who received the name 'Lo-Ammi', which mean 'Not My People'. Why? Because God said, "For you are not My people, and I will not be your God" (Hosea 1: 9). Because of their wickedness, God cast the people of Israel off. The people whom Peter addresses in his letter were mainly Gentiles scattered in different parts of the Roman Empire. To them, Peter also says that once they were not a people, and once they had not obtained mercy. Once the Gentiles, too, were living without God in their lives. They were not His people, but now they were, because once God had not shown them mercy, but now He had. Paul describes the same thing in his letter to the Ephesians, where he says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Eph 2: 1-3). The same applies to us, for we, too, are from among the Gentiles. In the prophecy of Hosea, God did give His people hope after He disowned them as His people. In Hosea 2, God declares that He will once again gather His people together, and then once again He will make them His people. He declares, "And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My peo-

ple!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'" (Hosea 2: 23). Paul applies this prophecy to the believers in Romans 9. He tells his readers that this is fulfilled in Christ, and now it applies to all those who believe in Him, both Jews and Gentiles.

When we were not God's people, and when we had not yet obtained His mercy, we were lost in our sins. As we said yesterday, it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. There was nothing special or appealing about us. Yet God chose us in His great mercy and made us His elect people. From where did He get us? Peter says that we were in darkness. We were living according to the flesh. We were living in the grip of sin. We were lost, groping around in the dark. But then something amazing happened! God called us out of this darkness. He opened our eyes of faith to see the light. He called us. First He chose us to be His own, and then He called us to Himself. This word 'called' is used in the New Testament to explain how God gathers for Himself a people for salvation. He calls us, and we respond in faith to that call and follow Him. This is all a gift of His wonderful grace. We believe that we have been chosen by God from eternity. Even before we existed, God had already chosen us. But then in our lifetime here on earth, He calls us to follow Him and live for Him. In the Canons of Dort, Chapter III/IV, Article 10, we read, "He (God) has chosen His own in Christ from eternity and calls them effectually within time. He gives them faith and repentance; He delivers them from the power of darkness and transfers them to the kingdom of His Son." This is all a work of God, which He accomplishes through His Word and Spirit.

We are also called God's own special people, or as the original says, 'a people for a possession'. We are His possession. He owns us, because Christ paid the ransom for us with His precious blood. God has chosen us and shown mercy to us and has now made us His own special possession among all other people. We are God's inheritance. We are the ones He aims to spend eternity with (Piper, April 1994). He will dwell in us and walk with us. We are the ones He will walk among and reveal Himself to in a personal relation forever (Piper, April 1984). We are God's covenant people. The word used for 'people' in the original is the same one that was used to describe Israel's special relationship to God.

being kept by the power of God. Paul testifies to this as well, when he says in Romans 8, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 31, 35, 38-39). Again the magnitude of God's love and mercy, which shines out from this fact, should cause us to praise and magnify Him.

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### **'The only security we have is in God's infallible commitment to fulfil the conditions of heaven.'**

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Our salvation is like a chain that extends back into eternity and forward into eternity. It is an unbreakable chain. God has put the chain together and continues to do so. If we look back, we see election; that God chose us from the beginning. And if we look forward, we can see the inheritance that God has reserved for us. At this time the two sides of the chain have not yet been connected to each other. We still have not come to the full enjoyment of the inheritance. There is a large chasm that we have to cross to get to a point when the two parts of the one chain are completely linked together. Problems can arise here. Too often we think that we need to put the chain together and so we attempt to do so in our own strength. But we are never sure that the chain has been connected properly and we don't know if we have the strength to finish the job. Sometimes we get smart about wanting to do things on our own. In order to prevent ourselves from falling into the chasm that separates us from the other end of the chain, we attach a safety belt around our waists and connect it to the chain we are holding. Putting on the safety belt gives us a false sense of security. We then think that if at times we let go of the chain for a while or stop working on connecting the chain, we won't fall to our death, but we can find another way to heaven than by the chain. In

both of these images, we have left God completely out of the picture. How we should truly see it is this: "Standing in the middle of this chasm which disappears into the abyss so deep no one can see the bottom is God Almighty. Under his right arm He is squeezing against His chest the chain of my salvation that leads into the past and connects with election, the death of Jesus, His resurrection and my new birth. Under His left arm he is squeezing the chain of heaven. The end of the chain of heaven hangs loosely over His left forearm waiting for the eventual attachment to my life. The end of the other chain is in his hands. And He is forging the necessary links of faithfulness that will make the chain long enough to connect properly with the chain of heaven" (Piper, Oct 1993). God is the one who is working in us to do acts of faithfulness. He "works in us to will and to do His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Again we must stand back and praise God our Father for His continued action in our lives.

We have come to realise that it is God at work in our lives and that He keeps us safe in His care as we move forward to the 'last time'. We have already learned that there is nothing that can separate us from His love. And yet we need protecting, because we face daily attacks. We may suffer, but that refines our faith. So we don't need protection from suffering. If we die, we are taken immediately to heaven to be with the Lord, so we don't need protection from that either. What we need protection from is the temptations we face, for Satan daily tries to attack us and lure us from the safe hands of the Lord. Satan knows that the only thing that can keep us from heaven is unbelief or not trusting God. So this is what God protects us from by His power. He strengthens and builds up our faith in Him, so that we look to Him alone and not to other so-called treasures along the way. It is all a work of God. We can do nothing to make our arrival in heaven automatic. The only security we have is "in God's infallible commitment to fulfil the conditions of heaven" (Piper, Oct 1993). We can feel completely secure, because God secures our inheritance, as well as protects His own on their way to enjoying this inheritance.

In hearing about our glorious God and Father and what He has done and is doing for us, we will be led to at least four stances in our lives.

We will be led to:

a) humility - Realising that there is nothing in ourselves that merits our salvation, but that it is all a work and gift of God should lead us to take on a humble attitude. We cannot go around puffed up with arrogance because God has saved us, while others are still lost in their sins. We cannot boast that we have a stronger faith than others, or brag about being more godly than others, even within the Church. Realising that we are no better than anyone else, that we too were under the curse, we should humbly bow before God and praise Him for His wondrous deeds of salvation.

b) rejoicing - Having a loving and merciful God, who sent His own Son into this world to die for us to pay for our sins, and receiving the promise from Him of eternal life should cause us to rejoice. We should live lives brimming over with joy. Others who see us should wonder why we are always joyful. It should be visible, since what better gift is there in the entire universe than this!

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**'We must carry on doing what the Lord puts before us, living in hope and looking forward to Christ's return and the receiving of the inheritance of eternal life.'**

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c) eager expectation - Knowing that we have been born anew to a living hope and to an inheritance that is safe in heaven for us, we should look forward with great eagerness to the time when we can taste the fullness of these gifts in store for us. If you knew you were set to receive a large bonus from your boss at the completion of an important job, you would be looking forward to the end of the job and the bonus in your hands. How much more should we not eagerly long for the greatest gift of all, eternal life!

d) patience - We live in this tension of knowing what's at the end, but not being there quite yet. We already know we will receive the inheritance (it is secured for us, after all), but we still don't have the fullness of it. It's like being in someone's will. Perhaps you have a very rich distant relative, and you find out you are in his will.

You know one day all your financial worries will probably be over, but you don't know when. You have to wait for the death of your relative before you can enjoy the inheritance. You have to be patient. And even when your relative dies, someone might contest the will, thinking the relative made a mistake putting you in the will in the first place. Not so with the inheritance kept in heaven for us by God. We can be certain it is ours, but we just need to be patient and wait for the Lord to bring His promises to fulfilment in His time.

In the meantime, we have our task here on earth. We must carry on doing what the Lord puts before us, living in hope and looking forward to Christ's return and the receiving of the inheritance of eternal life.

- Mark Hoogedyk

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# Special People, Special Task 1 Peter 2: 9-10

**W**ho are you? If someone asked you this question, how would you answer him or her? You could simply give your first name, or you could give your first name and your surname. You might identify yourself by saying who your parents are. You might inform someone of your nationality. There are several different ways of identifying yourself, all of which tell something about who we are and where we are from. But there is another way of identifying yourself, perhaps even the most important way.

Who are you? You are a Christian - a follower of Christ. Along with this identification comes a lot of special titles, and a very special task. As a Christian you are a foreigner living in a foreign land. Your real home is where your King lives. You are His ambassadors, representing Him in the place you temporarily call home. Let's have a look at the terms Peter uses to describe Christians and what he gives as our stated task as Christians.

Yesterday, we could hear that we received new birth from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to a living hope and an inheritance kept in heaven for us. Through the resurrection of our Saviour we have been made heirs of an everlasting kingdom. We are already citizens of this kingdom, but we will only experience the fullness of this in the last time. When Christ returns to take us to Himself, we will be entitled to live with Him forever in eternal peace and blessedness. Here on earth, we only get what Scriptures call a foretaste of what is to come. Yet being citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we also receive the identification as citizens of that kingdom.

What are the identifying characteristics of the citizens of God's kingdom? Peter calls us a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a possessed people (or God's possession), and a people who have received mercy. We receive these titles and identifications as members of the spiritual house of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. Of this house we are the living stones from which it is built (see 1 Peter 2: 4-5).

This house, of course, is the Church. And as we confess in Lord's Day 21, we believe that we are living members of it. These identifying marks belonged to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, but now Peter is applying them to us, the Church of the New Testament. How is it that we are now identified in the same way as the children of Israel were? Paul enlightens us on this matter in his letter to the Romans, where he writes, "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Rom 9: 6-8). The real descendants of Abraham are those who share the same faith as Abraham. Because they rejected the Lord and Saviour, the Jews were no longer God's special people. Now everyone throughout this world who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Master are the true children of Abraham, and as such the true children of God.

We are first of all called 'a chosen people'. The people of Israel, as descendants of Abraham, had this title in the Old Testament. God chose them from among all the other nations to be His own people. There was nothing that made them more special than any of the other nation on earth at that time. But in His grace and mercy, God chose them for His own purposes. We are now called His chosen people. Again, there was nothing special about us. We did not merit His mercy and grace. The word 'chosen' used in our text is the same word used in 1 Peter 1: 2, where Peter calls his readers 'the elect'. We became the 'elect' "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". "As Christians, each one of us was chosen by God to be a living stone of His new dwelling place, His Church" (Baltz, June 1996). We are chosen, elect by God. We have been adopted into His family as His children through the work of Christ Jesus on the cross. And now these chosen people of the Lord don't just come from the nation of Israel. But they come from all tribes, tongues, races, and nations throughout this world. All who come to know the Lord and