



## DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 PETER 1-2

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# The Identity Struggle

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*Since the tragic fall in Eden, humans have been confused about identity. We weren't made to live independently from God.*

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Feeling alienated from God, our forebears began to incorrectly name things. In the divine design, Adam and Eve were given the ability to name the animals. This meant they had the capacity to see the essential difference in created things and thereby had the ability to manage them. To misname is to mismanage. When they were cut off from God, they lost the insight necessary to properly identify themselves along with other things. And they quickly made such a mess of the created order that by the time of Noah, God concluded the Flood was the best solution.

Later in history, Babylon conquered Israel and took some of the best young

men. Immediately the Babylonians sought to change the identities of their captives. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were renamed. We know three of them by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel is known by his Hebrew name, even though the Babylonians called him Belteshazzar. The Babylonians knew that to control them, they had to rename them.

Today's secular culture is no less influenced by the spirit that works in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2). There is mass confusion about the basis of determining identity. The political strategists have magnified "identity politics." Each ethnic, geographical, or ideological

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group is separated, and they are often pitted against each other in order to manage (manipulate) them for political ends. People are identifying themselves on the basis of desires and feelings relating to gender. Some are choosing to use gender-neutral pronouns of their own creation in order to identify themselves. Some Christians are not sure who they are. They aren't sure if they are sinners or saints. When we define ourselves on the basis of our performance, we all come away confused.

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God created us with his word and then breathed his breath into us.  
**Our whole design aligned with this word.**

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How did we get so confused about our identity? In Romans chapter one, the apostle Paul gives what is probably the best summary of this development. He concludes that humans knew enough about God to recognize him as God and give thanks to him as the source of everything, but they chose not to name him as sovereign God. As a result,

they began to misname everything else. They called the created the creator. They exchanged the role of male and female. They lost the ability to name right from wrong. (See Romans 1:18–32.) The apostle Peter uses the analogy of the seed by which we are begotten. (See 1 Peter 1–2.) God created us with his word and then breathed his breath into us. Our whole design aligned with this word. When Adam and Eve received another word from the deceiver, that seed produced the confusion we face as children of Adam and Eve. We, like them, doubt the goodness and sovereignty of God. We, therefore, distrust him and disobey his instructions. We are in bondage to such deception until God initiates a rescue.

What is the nature of God's rescue? He creates something new. We are born again of his seed as we embrace the word of God in Jesus. He breathes his Spirit into us, and we are empowered to live according to the word that birthed us. We long for the milk that makes us grow. That milk is the continuing illumination of the word as we see clearer the true brilliance of Jesus our Savior. Those who feed

on the nourishment will grow as new creations. Those who neglect to feed on the pure milk will be stunted and continue to be confused as to who they are and what they should be doing.

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Peter reminded them that **God alone has the right and ability** to properly name us.

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Peter, writing to the scattered believers in the area of modern-day Turkey, knew that they could not survive in an unfriendly culture unless they knew who they were. After all, the Jews rejected them because they followed the Savior the Jews had rejected. The pagans rejected them because they were some strange sect of Judaism but different. They had no recognized identity in their culture. Peter reminded them that God alone has the right and ability to properly name us. One way of doing that was to explain how they were living stones in God's new temple. This was radical. Temples were important to ancient societies. Babylon was filled with temples to various gods. So were Persia, Athens, and Rome. Jerusalem

had one temple. It was the center of the city and the most important place on the earth. Israelites felt honored just to be in the city that housed the temple of Jehovah. It was holy in the highest sense.

Remember! David had wanted to build a temple for God. He was embarrassed that other religions had nice monuments for their gods, but Israel's God lived in a tent like they did. God allowed David's son to build a temple, and it was something to behold. Nothing in the world really compared to it. It was lavish. It is no wonder that the Jews took it so hard when Babylon destroyed their temple. They lost their identity as well as their glory. They pined for it in exile. Finally, after 70 years, they were allowed to go back and rebuild it. It was a poor substitute for the one Solomon built, but at least they had their most important edifice in place. Later Herod refurbished it and made it lavish again. The disciples of Jesus were highly impressed and pointed out to Jesus how magnificent it was. He shocked them by telling them that it would be totally destroyed in their generation. In 70 A.D. it was destroyed. Jesus

was the new temple in the new era. After his ascension, he began putting together the final and complete temple made of living stones. This temple would serve the purpose that God had always intended. It would display the glory of God in such a way that other nations would be drawn and converted to worship him alone.

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We are key players in God's agenda as **we submit to him and thereby enjoy him.**

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Peter tells these scattered no-names that they are part of the greatest edifice on earth and that they have the privilege of being his elite world-changers. In the past, they would have given anything to just visit the temple in Jerusalem. Now they were stones in its makeup. They were a part of the center of the society. They had more ability to effect change than anyone. They had the message of truth in the gospel, and they had the power of love as they lived among those walking in darkness. No one was more powerful or important than they. They only had to believe it. They had to decide who gets to

do the naming and discover on what basis identity is determined.

We are their brothers and sisters. What is true of those scattered ones is true of us. We, too, are providentially scattered among the nations as living stones in the new temple of God. We are not victims and no-names in God's kingdom, which is now inaugurated on earth. We are key players in God's agenda as we submit to him and thereby enjoy him. Since he has paid the price to be our master, we have no right to believe the word of anyone who does not align with his word to us. He has named us, and that is who we are.



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