

Prayer - 1 Peter 1:3-5, Part 1

by A.W. Pink

A.W. Pink's sermon explores the profound themes of praise and mercy found in 1 Peter 1:3-5, emphasizing the believer's relationship with God through Christ.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Praise and Worship"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the universal applicability of the New Testament epistles, arguing against the notion that they are solely for Jewish believers. He explains that the recipients of 1 Peter are spiritual sojourners, both Jewish and Gentile, who share in a heavenly calling and inheritance. Pink highlights the doxology in 1 Peter 1:3-5 as a profound expression of praise to God, acknowledging His abundant mercy and the living hope granted through Christ's resurrection. He stresses the importance of recognizing our identity as elect and the necessity of obedience as evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives. Ultimately, Pink encourages believers to reflect on their spiritual blessings and respond with heartfelt worship.

Transcript

Certain extremists among the Dispensationalists assert and insist that the last seven epistles of the New Testament (Hebrews through Jude) pertain not to all those who are members of the mystical body of Christ, but are entirely Jewish, penned by the apostles to the Circumcision and meant for them only. Such a wild and wicked assertion is an arbitrary invention of their own, for there is not a word in the Scriptures that substantiates their claim. On the contrary, there is much in those very Epistles that clearly repudiates such a view. One might as well affirm that the Epistles of Paul are "not for us" (twentieth-century saints) because they are addressed to companies of believers at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, and so forth. The precise identity of the professing Christians to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was originally addressed cannot be discovered. It is vital to recognize, however, that the Epistle is addressed to those who are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1, ital. mine), something that in no wise pertained to the Jewish nation as a whole. Though the Epistle of James was written to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," yet it was addressed to those members of them who were begotten of God (James 1:18). The Epistles of John are manifestly the letters of a father in Christ to his dear children (1 John 2:12; 5:21)--and as such convey the solicitous care of the heavenly Father for His own--to those who had Jesus Christ for their Advocate (1 John 2:1). Jude's Epistle is also a general one, directed to "them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ" (v. 1).

Those for Whom Peter Offers this Doxology

The first Epistle of Peter is addressed to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). The American Standard Version more literally renders it, "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, . . ." that is, to Jews who are absent from Palestine, residing in Gentile lands (cf. John 7:35). But care needs to be taken that the term sojourners be not limited to its literal force, but rather be given also its figurative meaning and spiritual application. It refers not strictly to the fleshly descendants of Abraham, but rather to his spiritual seed, who were partakers of the heavenly calling, and as such, were away from their home. The patriarchs "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. . . For they. . . declare plainly that they seek a country. . . a better country [than the earthly Canaan], that is, an heavenly" (Heb. 11: 13-16, brackets mine). Even David, while reigning as king in Jerusalem, made a similar acknowledgment: "I am a stranger in the earth" (Ps. 119:19). All Christians are strangers in this world; for while they are "at home in the body," they are "absent from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6). Their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Thus it was spiritual sojourners (temporary residents) to whom Peter wrote, those who had been begotten to an inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

Nor were all the spiritual strangers from the natural stock of Abraham. There is more than one indication in this very Epistle that while possibly a majority of them were Jewish believers, yet by no means were all of them so. Thus, in chapter 2, verse 10, after stating that God had called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, the Apostle Peter goes on to describe them with these words: "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." This precisely delineates the case of the Gentile believers (cf. Eph. 2:12, 13). Peter is here quoting from Hosea 1:9, 10 (where the "children of Israel" in v. 10 refers to the spiritual Israel), which is definitely interpreted for us in Romans 9:24, 25: "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles[.] As he saith also in Osee [Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; . . ." (brackets mine). Again, in chapter 4, verse 3, Peter says by way of reminder to those to whom he is writing, "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." The last category of transgression could only refer to Gentiles; for the Jews (when considered as a nation), since the Babylonian captivity, had never fallen into idolatry.

The Prayer Itself

As we examine together the prayer contained in 1 Peter 1:3-5, let us consider eight things: (1) its connection--that we may perceive who all are included by the words "begotten us again"; (2) its nature--a doxology ("Blessed be"); (3) its Object--"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"; (4) its ascription--"His abundant mercy"; (5) its incitement--"hath begotten us again unto a lively hope"; (6) its acknowledgment--"by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"; (7) its substance--"to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"; and (8) its guaranty--"who are kept by the power of God through faith." There is much here of interest and deep importance. Therefore, it would be wrong for us to hurriedly dismiss such a passage with a few generalizations, especially since it contains such a wealth of spiritual, joyful reflection that cannot but edify the mind and stir up the will and affections of every saint who rightly meditates upon it. May we be duly affected by its contents and truly enter into its elevated spirit.

First, we consider its connection. Those on whose behalf the apostle offered this doxology are spoken of according to their literal and figurative circumstances in verse 1, and then described by their spiritual characters: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (v. 2). That description pertains equally to all the regenerate in every age. When connected with election, the "foreknowledge of God" refers not to His eternal and universal prescience, for that embraces all beings and events, past, present and future; and, therefore, it has for its objects the non-elect as well as the elect. Consequently, there is no allusion whatever to God's preview of our believing or any other virtue in the objects of His choice. Rather, the term foreknowledge has respect to the spring or source of election, namely, God's unmerited good will and approbation. For this sense of the word know see the following: Psalm 1:6; Amos 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:19. For a like sense of the word foreknow see Romans 11:2. Therefore, the phrase "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" signifies that the favored persons thus described were fore-loved by Him, that they were the objects of His eternal favor, unalterably delighted in by Him as He foreviewed them in Christ-- "wherein he hath made us accepted [or "objects of grace"] in the beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6, brackets mine).

Obedience, an Indispensable Sign of the Spirit's Saving Work

"Through sanctification of the Spirit." It is by means of the Spirit's gracious and effectual operations that our election by God the Father takes effect (see 2 Thess. 2:13). The words "sanctification of the Spirit" have reference to His work of regeneration, whereby we are quickened (made alive), anointed, and consecrated or set apart to God. The underlying idea of sanctification is almost always that of separation. By the new birth we are distinguished from those dead in sin. The words "unto obedience" here in 1 Peter 1:2 signify that by the Spirit's effectual call we are made subject to the authoritative call of the Gospel (see v. 22 and Rom. 10:1, 16) and subsequently to its precepts. Election never promotes license, but always produces holiness and good works (Eph. 1:4; 2:10). The Spirit regenerates sinners to a new life of hearty submission to Christ and not to a life of self-pleasing. When the Spirit sanctifies a soul, it is to the end that he may adorn the Gospel by a walk that is regulated thereby. It is by his obedience that a Christian makes evident his election by the Father, for previously he was one of "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). By his new life of obedience he furnished proof of the Spirit's supernatural work within him.

"And sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." It is important for us to grasp the distinction between the sprinkling of Christ's blood and the shedding of it (Heb. 9:22). The shedding is Godward; whereas the sprinkling is its application to the believer, whereby he obtains forgiveness and peace of conscience (Heb. 9:13, 14; 10:22), and by which his service is rendered acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5).

A careful reading of the whole Epistle makes it evident that these saints were passing through severe trials (see 1 Peter 1:6, 7; 2:19-21; 3:16-18; 4:12-16; 5:8, 9). Jewish Christians (who evidently made up the majority of those originally addressed by Peter) have ever been sorely oppressed, persecuted not so much by the profane world as by their own brethren according to the flesh. How bitter and fierce was the hatred of such unbelieving Jews appears not only from the case of Stephen, but from what the Apostle Paul suffered at their hands (2 Cor. 11: 24-26). As a means of encouragement, the Apostle Paul deliberately reminded his Hebrew brethren of the persecutions they had already endured for Christ's sake. "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; . . . and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods" (Heb. 10:32-34). By bearing this fact in mind a better understanding is had of many of the details of the Book of Hebrews. Furthermore, it becomes more apparent why Peter has so much to say upon affliction, and why he refers so often to the sufferings of Christ. His brethren were in need of a stimulating cordial that would nerve them to heroic endurance. He

therefore dwelt on those aspects of Divine truth best adapted to support the soul, strengthen faith, inspire hope, and produce steadfastness and good works.

This Prayer a Doxology, an Expression of Unmixed Praise to God

Secondly, we examine its nature. It is a tribute of praise. In this prayer the apostle is not making supplication to God, but rather is offering adoration to Him! This is as much our privilege and duty as it is to spread our needs before Him; yea, the one should ever be accompanied by the other. It is "with thanksgiving" that we are bidden to let our "requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). And that is preceded by the exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always," which rejoicing is to find its expression in gratitude and by the ascribing of glory to Him. If we be suitably affected by God's bounties, we cannot but bless the Bestower of them. In verse 2, Peter had mentioned some of the most noteworthy and comprehensive of all the Divine benefits, and this exclamation, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" is the echo, or better, the reflex of the Apostle Peter's heart in response to God's amazing grace toward himself and his brethren. This particular doxology is also to be regarded as a devout acknowledgment of the inestimable favors that God had bestowed on His elect, as enlarged upon in verse 3. As the apostle reflected upon the glorious blessings conferred on hell-deserving sinners, his heart was drawn out in fervent worship to the benign Author of them.

Thus it should be, thus it must be, with Christians today. God has no dumb children (Luke 17:7). Not only do they cry to Him day and night in their distress, but they frequently praise Him for His excellency and give thanks for His benefits. As they meditate upon His abundant mercy in having begotten them to a living hope, as they anticipate by faith the glorious inheritance that is reserved for them in heaven, and as they realize that these flow from the sovereign favor of God to them through the death and resurrection of His dear Son, well may they exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Doxologies, then, are expressions of holy joy and adoring homage. Concerning the particular term blessed, Ellicott most helpfully remarks,

This form of Greek word is consecrated to God alone: Mark 14:61; Romans 9:5; 2 Corinthians 11:31. It is a completely different word from the "blessed" or "happy" of the Beatitudes and different from the "blessed" of our Lord's mother in Luke 1:28, 42. This form of it [in 1 Peter 1:3] implies that blessing is always due on account of something inherent in the person, while that only implies a blessing has been received.

Thus we see again how minutely discriminating and accurate is the language of Holy Writ.

The Glorious Object of Praise

Thirdly, we behold its Object. This doxology is addressed to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," which is explained by Calvin thus:

For as formerly, by calling Himself the God of Abraham, He designed to mark the difference between Him and all fictitious gods; so after He has manifested Himself in His own Son, His will is, not to be known otherwise than in Him. Hence they who form their ideas of God in His naked majesty apart from Christ, have an idol instead of the true God, as the case is with the Jews and the Turks [that is, the Mohammedans, to which we may add the Unitarians]. Whosoever, then, seeks really to know the only true God, must regard Him as the Father of Christ.

Moreover, in Psalm 72:17, it is foretold of Christ that "men shall be blessed in him" and that "all nations shall call him blessed." Whereupon the sacred singer breaks forth into this adoring praise: "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things" (v. 18). That was the Old Testament form of doxology (cf. 1 Kings 1:48; 1 Chron. 29:10); but the New Testament doxology (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3) is expressed in accordance with the self-revelation the Deity has made in the Person of Jesus Christ: "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5:23).

God the Father is not here viewed absolutely but relatively, that is, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself is contemplated in His mediatorial character, that is, as the eternal Son vested with our nature. As such, the Father appointed and sent Him forth on His redeeming mission. In that capacity and office the Lord Jesus owned and served Him as His God and Father. From the beginning He was engaged in His Father's business, ever doing those things that were pleasing in His sight. By God's Word He was regulated in all things. Jehovah was His "portion" (Ps. 16:5), His "God" (Ps. 22:1), His "All." Christ was under Him (John 6:38; 14:28): "the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). In a covenant way, too, He was and is the God and Father of Christ (John 20:17), not only so while Christ was here on earth, but even now that He is in heaven. This is clear from Christ's promise after His ascension: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God. . ." (Rev. 3:12, ital. mine). Yet this official subordination of Christ to God the Father in no wise militates against nor modifies His essential equality with Him (John 1:1-3; 5:23; 10:30-33).

Because the Father of Our Surety, He Is Our Father

It is to be carefully noted that praise is here rendered not to "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ" but of "our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, God's relationship to us is determined by His relationship to our Surety. He is the God and Father of sinners only in Christ. He is adored as the covenant Head of the Savior and of His elect in Him. This is a point of first importance: the connection that the Church sustains to God is fixed by that of the Redeemer to God, for she is Christ's and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3:23). The title "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the peculiar and characteristic Christian designation of Deity, contemplating Him as the God of redemption (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 11:31; Col. 1:3). When an Israelite called on Him as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," he recognized and owned Him not only as the Creator and moral Governor of the world, but also as the covenant God of his nation. So when the Christian addresses Him as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he acknowledges Him as the Author of eternal redemption through the incarnate Son, who voluntarily took the place of subserviency to and dependence upon Him. In the highest meaning of the word, God is the Father of no man until he is united to the One whom He commissioned and sent to be the Savior of sinners, the sole Mediator between God and men.

The language in which God is here worshiped explains how it is that He can be so kind and bounteous to His people. All blessings come to the creature from God. He it is who gave them being and supplies their varied needs. Equally so, all spiritual blessings proceed from Him (Eph. 1:3; James 1:17). The Highest is "kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35). But spiritual blessings issue from Him not simply as God, nor from the Father absolutely, but from "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In what follows, the apostle makes mention of His abundant mercy, of His begetting the elect to a living hope, and of an inheritance that infinitely transcends all earthly good. And in the bestowment of these favors God is here acknowledged in the special character in which He confers them. If it be asked, How can a holy God endow sinful men with such blessings? the answer is, as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It

is because God is well pleased with the Redeemer that He is well pleased with the redeemed. The work of Christ merited such a reward, and He shares it with His own (John 17:22). All comes to us from the Father through the Son.

His Abundant Mercy, the Cause of God's Gracious Choice

Fourthly, let us ponder its ascription, which is found in the phrase "his abundant mercy." Just as God did not elect because He foresaw that any would savingly repent and believe the Gospel--for these are the effects of His invincible call, which in turn is the consequence and not the cause of election--but "according to his own purpose" (2 Tim. 1:9), neither does He regenerate because of any merits possessed by the subjects thereof, but solely of His own sovereign pleasure (James 1:18). His abundant mercy is here set oven against our abundant demerits, and to the degree that we are sensible of the latter shall we be moved to render praise for the former. Such is our woeful case through sin that naught but Divine mercy can relieve it. Give ear to the words of C. H. Spurgeon:

No other attribute could have helped us had mercy refused. As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatening of the law, and wrath fulfils it. It is from the mercy of God that all our hopes begin. Mercy is needed for the miserable, and yet more for the sinful. Misery and sin are fully united in the human race, and mercy here performs her noblest deeds. My brethren, God has vouchsafed His mercy unto us, and we must thankfully acknowledge that in our case His mercy has been abundant mercy.

We were defiled with abundant sin, and only the multitude of His loving kindnesses could have put those sins away. We were infected with an abundant evil, and only overflowing mercy can ever cure us of all our natural disease, and make us meet for heaven. We have received abundant grace up till now; we have made great drafts upon the exchequer of God, and of His fullness have all we received grace for grace. Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded. . . Everything in God is on a grand scale. Great power--He shakes the world. Great wisdom--He balances the clouds. His mercy is commensurate with His other attributes: it is Godlike mercy, infinite mercy! You must measure His Godhead before you can compute His mercy. Well may it be called "abundant" if it be infinite. It will always be abundant, for all that can be drawn from it will be but as the drop of a bucket to the sea itself. The mercy which deals with us is not man's mercy, but God's mercy, and therefore boundless mercy.

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