

Prayer - 1 Peter 1:3-5, Part 2

by A.W. Pink

A.W. Pink's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of God's abundant mercy through regeneration and the resulting living hope in believers.

Scripture: Nehemiah 9:27, Psalm 86:5, Psalm 86:13, Luke 1:78, Romans 8:32, Romans 9:15, Ephesians 1:3, Titus 3:4-5, Hebrews 6:19, 1 Peter 1:3-5

Topics: "God's Mercy", "Regeneration"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the abundant mercy of God as the foundation of our regeneration and lively hope in Christ, highlighting that this mercy is both general and special. He explains that God's mercy is not only a characteristic of His nature but is also demonstrated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which assures believers of their new birth and eternal life. Pink urges believers to recognize the transformative power of this mercy, which leads to a living hope that is active and purifying in their lives. He contrasts the genuine hope of the regenerate with the false hopes of the unregenerate, underscoring that true hope is rooted in the promises of God and the work of Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a heartfelt acknowledgment of God's mercy, which is essential for spiritual life and growth.

Transcript

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." Let us begin this chapter with a continuation of our examination of the ascription of this doxology. God the Father is here viewed as the covenant Head of the Mediator and of God's elect in Him, and is thus accorded His distinctive Christian title (see, for example, Eph. 1:3). This title sets Him forth as the God of redemption. "Abundant mercy" is ascribed to Him. This is one of His ineffable perfections, yet the exercise of it--as of all His other attributes--is determined by His own imperial will (Rom. 9:15). Much is said in Scripture concerning this Divine excellency. We read of His "tender mercy" (Luke 1:78). David declares, "For great is thy mercy" (Ps. 86:13); "thou, Lord, art . . . plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 86:5). Nehemiah speaks of His "manifold mercies" (Neh. 9:27). Listen to David describe the effect that meditating upon this attribute, as he had practically experienced it, had upon his worship: "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple" (Ps. 5:7). Blessed be His name, "for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. 107:1). Well then may each believer join with the Psalmist in saying, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy. . ." (Ps. 59:16). To this attribute especially should erring saints look: "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1).

God's General and Special Mercy Must Be Distinguished

It must be pointed out that there is both a general and a special mercy. That distinction is a necessary and important one, yea, a vital one; for many poor souls are counting upon the former instead of looking by faith to the latter. "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). Considering how much wickedness abounds in this world, the discerning and contrite heart can say with the Psalmist, "The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy. . ." (Ps. 119:64). For the good of our souls it is essential that we grasp the distinction revealed in God's Word between this general mercy and God's special benignity to His elect. By virtue of His eminence as a gift of God, Christ is denominated "the Mercy promised to our fathers" (Luke 1:72, ital. mine). How aptly does the Psalmist declare, "Thy mercy is great above the heavens" (Ps. 108:4; cf. Eph. 4:10); for there is God's mercyseat found (see Heb. 9, especially vv. 5, 23, 24), upon which the exalted Savior is now seated administering the fruits of His redemptive work. It is thither that the convicted and sin-burdened soul must look for saving mercy. To conclude that God is too merciful to damn any one eternally is a delusion with which Satan fatally deceives multitudes. Pardoning mercy is obtainable only through faith in the atoning blood of the Savior. Reject Him, and Divine condemnation is inescapable.

This Mercy Is Abundant Because It Is Covenant Mercy

The mercy here celebrated by Peter is very clearly a particular and discriminating one. It is that of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and it flows to its favored objects "by [means of] the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (brackets mine) It is between those two phrases that we find these words firmly lodged: "who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." Thus it is covenant mercy, redemptive mercy, regenerating mercy. Rightly is it styled "abundant mercy," especially in view of the Bestower. For this abundant mercy issues from the self-sufficient Jehovah, who is infinitely and immutably blessed in Himself, who would have incurred no personal loss had He abandoned the whole human race to destruction. It was of His mere good pleasure that He did not. It is seen to be "abundant mercy" when we view the character of its objects, namely, depraved rebels, whose minds were enmity against God. It also appears thus when we contemplate the nature of its peculiar blessings. They are not the common and temporal ones, such as health and strength, sustenance and preservation that are bestowed upon the wicked, but spiritual, celestial, and everlasting benefits such as had never entered the mind of man to conceive.

Still more so is it seen to be "abundant mercy" when we contemplate the means through which those blessings are conveyed to us: "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," which necessarily presupposes His incarnation and crucifixion. What other language but "abundant mercy" could appropriately express the Father's sending forth of His beloved Son to take upon Himself the form of a servant, to assume to Himself flesh and blood, and to be born in a manger all for the sake of those whose multitudinous iniquities deserved eternal punishment? That Blessed One came here to be the Surety of His people, to pay their debts, to suffer in their stead, to die the Just for the unjust. Therefore, God spared not His own Son but called upon the sword of justice to smite Him. He delivered Him up to the curse that He might "freely give us all things" (Rom. 8:32). Thus it is a righteous mercy, even as the Psalmist declares: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). It was at the cross that the seemingly conflicting attributes of mercy and justice, love and wrath, holiness and peace united, just as the various colors of the light, when separated by a natural prism of mist, are seen beautifully blended together in the rainbow--the token and emblem of the covenant (Gen. 9:12-17; Rev. 4:3).

Meditation on the Miracle of the New Birth Evokes Fervent Praise

Fifthly, let us consider the incitement of this doxology, which is found in the following words: "which [who] according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." It was the realization that God had quickened those who were dead in sins that moved Peter to bless Him so fervently. The words "hath begotten us" have reference to their regeneration. Later in the chapter the apostle describes them as having been "born again" (v. 23) and in the next chapter addresses them as "newborn babes" (1 Peter 2:2). A new and a spiritual life, Divine in its origin, was imparted to them, wrought in their souls by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6). That new life was given for the purpose of forming a new character and for the transforming of their conduct. God had sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, thereby communicating to them a holy disposition, who, as the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), was inclining them to love Him. It is styled a begetting, not only because it is then that the spiritual life begins and that a holy seed is implanted (1 John 3:9), but also because an image or likeness of the Begetter Himself is conveyed (1 John 5:1). As fallen Adam "begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3), so at the new birth the Christian is "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

In the words "begotten us again" there is a twofold allusion: a comparison and a contrast. First, just as God is the efficient cause of our being, so He is also of our wellbeing; our natural life comes from Him, and so too does our spiritual life. Secondly, the Apostle Peter intends to distinguish our new birth from the old one. At our first begetting and birth we were conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity (Ps. 51:5); but at our regeneration we are "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). By the new birth we are delivered from the reigning power of sin, for we are then made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Henceforth there is a perpetual conflict within the believer. Not only does the flesh lust against the spirit, but the spirit lusts against the flesh (Gal. 5:17). It is not sufficiently recognized and realized that the new nature or principle of grace of necessity makes war upon the old nature or principle of evil. This spiritual begetting is attributed to God's "abundant mercy," for it was induced by nothing in or from us. We had not so much as a desire after Him: in every instance He is able to declare, "I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa. 65:1; cf. Rom. 3:11). As believers love Him because He first loved them (1 John 4:19), likewise they did not become seekers after Christ until He first sought and effectually called them (Luke 15; John 6:44; 10:16).

This begetting is according to the abundant mercy of God. Mercy was most eminently displayed here. For regeneration is the fundamental blessing of all grace and glory, being the first open manifestation that the elect receive of God's love to them. "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:4, 5). As Thomas Goodwin so aptly expressed it,

God's love is like a river or spring which runs underground, and hath done so from eternity. When breaks it forth first? When a man is effectually called, then that river, which hath been from everlasting underground, and through Christ on the cross, breaks out in a man's own heart, too.

It is then that we are experientially made God's children, received into His favor, and conformed to His image. Therein is a remarkable display of His benignity. At the new birth the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and that is the introduction into, as well as the sure pledge of, every other spiritual blessing for time and eternity. As the predestinating love of God ensures our effectual call or regeneration, so regeneration guarantees our justification and glorification (Rom. 8:29, 30).

God's Work of Regeneration Precedes Our Repentance and Faith

Let us now retrace our steps, going over again the ground we have covered, but in the inverse order. Not until a soul has been begotten of God can we have any spiritual apprehension of the Divine mercy. Before that miracle of grace takes place he is possessed more or less of a pharisaical spirit. To sincerely bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His abundant mercy is the heartfelt acknowledgment of one who has turned away with loathing from the filthy rags of his own righteousness (Isa. 64:6) and who places no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). Equally true is it that no unregenerate person ever has his conscience sprinkled with the peace-producing blood of Christ, for until spiritual life is imparted evangelical repentance and saving faith are morally impossible. Therefore, there can be no realization of our desperate need of a Savior or any actual trusting in Him until we are quickened (made alive) by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:1), that is, born again (John 3:3). Still more evident is it that so long as a person remains dead in sin, with his mind set at enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), there can be no acceptable obedience to Him; for He will neither be imposed upon nor bribed by rebels. And certain it is that none who are in love with this world's painted baubles will conduct themselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth"; for they are perfectly at home here.

Regeneration Produces a Living Hope

"Begotten us again unto a lively hope." This is the immediate effect and fruit of the new birth, and is one of the characteristic marks that distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. Hope always has respect to something in the future (Rom. 8:24, 25), being an eager expectation of something desirable, an anticipation of a promised good, whether real or imaginary. The heart of the natural man is largely buoyed up, and his spirits maintained, by contemplations of some improvement in his lot that will increase his happiness in this world. But in the majority of instances the things dreamed of never materialize, and even when they do the result is always disappointing. For no real satisfaction of soul is to be found in anything under the sun. If such disillusioned souls have come under the influence of man-made religion, then they will seek to persuade themselves of, and look forward to, something far better for themselves in the hereafter. But such expectations will prove equally vain, for they are but the fleshly imaginings of carnal men. The false hope of the hypocrite (Job 8:13), the presumptuous hope of those who neither revere God's holiness nor fear His wrath but who count upon His mercy, and the dead hope of the graceless professor will but mock their subjects.

The Christian's Hope Is Both Living and Lively

In contradistinction to the delusive expectations cherished by the unregenerate, God's elect are begotten again to a real and substantial hope. This hope, which fills their minds and acts upon their wills and affections (thus radically altering the orientation of their thoughts, words, and deeds) is based upon the objective promises of God's Word (which are summarized in v. 4). In most of its occurrences, the Greek adjectival participle from *ζωω*; (to live; no. 2198 in Strong's Greek Dictionary) is translated living, though in Acts 7:38 (as here in 1 Peter 1:3) it is rendered lively. Both meanings are accurate and appropriate in this context. The Christian's hope is a sure and steadfast one (Heb. 6:19) because it rests upon the word and oath of Him that cannot lie. It is the gift of Divine grace (2 Thess. 2:16), a fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5), inseparably connected with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13). It is a living hope because it is exerted by a quickened soul, being an exercise of the new nature or principle of grace received at regeneration. It is a living hope because it has eternal life for its object (Titus 1:2). What a glorious change has taken place, for before we were begotten of God many of us were captivated by "a certain fearful

looking for of judgment" (Heb. 10:27), and through fear of death were "all their [our] lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15, brackets mine). It is also termed "a living hope" because it is imperishable, one that looks and lasts beyond the grave. Should death overtake its possessor, far from frustration, hope then enters into its fruition.

This inward hope of the believer is not only a living but a lively one, for it is--like faith and love--an active principle in his soul, animating him to patience, steadfastness, and perseverance in the path of duty. Therein it differs radically from the dead hope of religious formalists and empty professors, for theirs never stirs them to spiritual activity or produces anything to distinguish them from respectable worldlings who make no profession at all. It is the possession and exercise of this lively hope that affords demonstration that we have been "begotten. . . again." By Divine begetting a spiritual life is communicated, and that life manifests itself by desires after spiritual things, by a seeking of satisfaction in spiritual objects, and by a cheerful performance of spiritual duties. The genuineness and reality of this "lively hope" is, in turn, evidenced by its producing a readiness to the denying of self and to the enduring of afflictions, thus acting as "an anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19) amid the storms of life. This hope further distinguishes itself by purging its possessor. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). It is also a "lively hope" in that it cheers and enlivens its possessor; for as he views the blissful goal courage is imparted and inspiration afforded, enabling him to endure to the end of his trials.

The Saving Virtue of Christ's Resurrection

Sixthly, let us consider the acknowledgment of this prayer, namely, "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." From the position occupied by these words, it is plain that they are related to and govern the preceding words as well as the verse that follows. Equally obvious it is that the resurrection of Christ implies His previous life and death, though each possesses its own distinctive value and virtue. The connection between the resurrection of Christ and the exercise of the abundant mercy of God the Father in His bringing us from death to life, His putting into our hearts a living hope, and His bringing us into a glorious inheritance is a very real and intimate one. As such it calls for our devout attention. The Savior's rising again from the dead was the climactic proof of the Divine origin of His mission and thus a ratification of His Gospel. It was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Him, and thus proved Him to be the promised Messiah. It was the accomplishment of His own predictions, and thus certified Him to be a true prophet. It determined the context between Him and the Jewish leaders. They condemned Him to death as an impostor, but by restoring the temple of His body in three days He demonstrated that they were liars. It witnessed to the Father's acceptance of His redemptive work.

There is, however, a much closer connection between the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the hope of eternal life that is set before His people. His emerging in triumph from the tomb furnished indubitable proof of the efficacy of His propitiatory sacrifice, by which He had put away the sins of those for whom it was offered. This being accomplished, by His resurrection Christ brought in an everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24), thus securing for His people the eternal reward due Him by His fulfillment of God's Law by His own perfect obedience. He who was delivered up to death for our offenses was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25). Attend to the words of John Brown (to whose commentary on 1 Peter I am greatly indebted):

When God "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant," He manifested Himself to be "the God of peace," the pacified Divinity. He "raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in himself" [1 Peter 1:2 1].

Had Jesus not risen, "our faith had been in vain; we should have been still in our sins" [1 Cor. 15:17], and without hope. But now that He is risen,

Our Surety freed, declares us free,

For whose offences He was seized;

In His release our own we see,

And joy to view Jehovah pleased.

But even this is not all. Our Lord's resurrection is to be viewed not only in connection with His death, but with the following glory. Raised from the dead, He has received "all power in heaven and on earth, that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him." How this is calculated to encourage hope, may be readily apprehended. "Because he lives, we shall live also." Having the keys of death and the unseen world, He can and will raise us from the dead, and give us eternal life. He sits at the right hand of God. "Our life is hid with him in God; and when he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory." We are not yet in possession of the inheritance; but He, our Head and Representative, is. "We see not yet all things put under us; but we see him," the Captain of our salvation, "for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour." The resurrection of Christ, when considered in reference to the death which preceded and the glory which followed it, is the grand means of producing and strengthening the hope of eternal life.

By faith we now behold Christ seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, from whence He is administering all the outworking of that redemption which He has accomplished. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31, brackets mine).

More specifically, not only is the resurrection of Christ the legal basis upon which God the Father imputes the righteousness of Christ to the accounts of believing sinners, but it is also the legal warrant upon which the Holy Spirit proceeds to regenerate those sinners in order that they might initially believe on Christ, turn from their sins, and be saved. Unfortunately, like so many other fine points of Gospel doctrine, this is little understood today. The spirit of a man must be brought forth from its death in sin before his body will be subject to being raised in glory at the last day. And while the Holy Spirit is the One who spiritually quickens God's elect, it must be remembered that He is sent forth, to do His saving work, by the kingly power of the risen Christ, to whom that authority was given as the reward of His finished work (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:33; Rev. 3:1). In James 1:18, the new birth is traced back to the sovereign will of the Father. In Ephesians 1:19 and following, the new birth and its gracious consequences are attributed to the gracious operation of the Spirit. Here in our text, while issuing from the abundant mercy of the Father, it is ascribed to the virtue of Christ's triumph over death. It is to be observed that Christ's own resurrection is termed a begetting of Him (Ps. 2:7; cf. Acts 13:33), while our spiritual resurrection is designated a regeneration (Titus 3:5). Christ is expressly called "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5). This He is called because His resurrection marked a new beginning both for Him and for His people.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net