

# **The Prayers of the Apostles**

**Booklet Three  
1 Peter 1:3-5**



**A. W. Pink**



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*“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 by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” 1 Peter 1:3-5.*

Certain schools of the “Dispensationalists” aver and insist that the last seven epistles of the New Testament (Hebrews—Jude) pertain not to 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 which substantiates it, but on the contrary, much in those very epistles which clearly repudiates such a view. As well affirm that the epistles of Paul are “not for us” (British and American saints), because they are addressed to companies at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, etc. Whoever the persons entitled “the Hebrews,” that epistle belongs to those who are “partakers of the *heavenly* calling” (Heb. 3:1)—something which in no wise pertained to the Jewish nation as such. Though the epistle of James be written to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (Jam. 1:1), yet it was those members of them who were begotten of God (Jam. 1:18). The epistles of John are manifestly the letters of the Father to His dear children (1 John 2:12; 5:21), who had Jesus Christ for their Advocate (1 John 2:1). Jude is also a general one, “to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude :1).

The first epistle of Peter is addressed to “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1), or as the American Revised Version more literally renders, “to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus,” etc.: that is, to Jews who are absent from Palestine, residing in Gentile lands—compare John 7:35. But care needs to be taken that the term “strangers” or “sojourners” is not limited to its literal force, but given to 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, away from their home. The patriarchs “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth...for they desire a better country [than the earthly Canaan], that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:13-16). So too David, even when king in Jerusalem, acknowledged, “I am a stranger in the earth” (Psa. 119:19). All Christians are “strangers” in this scene, 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* “strangers” unto whom Peter wrote, those who had been begotten unto “an inheritance” reserved for them in heaven (1 Pet. 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 all of them were so. Thus, in 1 Peter 2:10, after stating that God had called them out of darkness into His marvellous light, the apostle went on to say, “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,” which was the case with the *Gentiles* (compare Eph. 2:12, 13). Peter was there quoting from Hosea 1:9, 10 (the “children of Israel” in verse 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” Again, in 1 Peter 4:3, Peter reminds those to whom he was 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*”—which could only refer to Gentiles, for the Jews, since Babylonish captivity, never fell into idolatry.

In connection with the prayer in 1 Peter 1:3-5, we shall consider seven things. First, its connection—that we may perceive who are included in the “begotten *us*” (verse 3). Second, its nature: another doxology—“Blessed be.” Third, its Object: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Fourth, its ascription: “His abundant mercy.” Fifth, its incitement: “Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” Sixth, its acknowledgement: “By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Seventh, its substance: “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for [us]” (verse 4). There is much here of interest and deep importance, and therefore, it would be wrong for us to hurriedly dismiss such a passage with a few generalizations, especially since it contains so much that has not come before us in the preceding prayers. It is not that we are seeking to unduly prolong this series—though we admit we shall be sorry when the end of it is reached—but that we desire to consider this prayer as carefully as we have each of the others. May we be duly affected by its contents and truly enter into its elevated spirit.

First, *its connection*. Those on whose behalf the apostle offered this doxology are spoken of according to their literal and figurative circumstances (1 Pet. 1:1), 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” (verse 2). That description pertains equally to *all* the regenerate in every dispensation or 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 has for its objects the non-elect equally with the elect; consequently, there is no allusion whatever to God’s preview of our believing or any other excellence in the objects of His choice. Rather has the term, “foreknowledge” respect to the spring or source of election, namely God’s good will and approbation—see Psalm 1:6, Amos 3:2, and 2 Timothy 2:19 for *this* sense of the word “know;” and Romans 11:2 for “foreknow.” Thus, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” signifies that, the favoured subjects thereof were fore-loved by Him, that they were the objects of His eternal favour, unalterably delighted in by Him as He foreviewed them in Christ—“accepted [or ‘graced’] in the beloved” (Eph. 1:4-6).

“Through sanctification of the Spirit” (1 Pet. 1:2). It is via and by means of the Spirit’s gracious and effectual operations that our election by God the Father takes effect: see 2 Thessalonians 2:13. “Sanctification of the Spirit” has reference to His work of regeneration, whereby we are quickened, anointed, consecrated, and set apart unto God. The underlying idea of “sanctification” is almost always that of *separation*: by the new birth, we are distinguished from those dead in sin. “Unto obedience” signified *here*, unto the authoritative call of the Gospel (Rom. 10:16, 1; 1 Pet. 1:22) and subsequently to its precepts. Election is never unto license, but to holiness and good works (Eph. 1:4; 2:10); and the Spirit regenerates unto a heart-submission to Christ, and not to a life of self-pleasing. When the Spirit sanctifies a soul, it is that he may adorn the Gospel by a walk which 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); and by it, he furnishes proof of the Spirit’s supernatural work within him. “And sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2), which must be distinguished from His blood-shedding (Heb. 9:22). The

“shedding” is Godward: the “sprinkling” is its application unto the believer, whereby he obtains forgiveness and peace of conscience (Heb. 9:13, 14; 10:22), and by which his service is rendered acceptable unto God (1 Pet. 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; 4:12-15; 5:8, 9. Jewish Christians 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 the hatred of such appears not only from the case of Stephen, but from what the apostle suffered at their hands (2 Cor. 11:24-26). Writing to the Hebrews, he bade them, “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 the fact in mind, a better understanding is had of many details. It then becomes more apparent why Peter has so much to say upon affliction, and why he refers so often to the sufferings of Christ. They were in need of both a stimulating cordial and that which would nerve unto heroic endurance. He therefore dwelt upon those aspects of truth best adopted to support the soul, strengthen faith, inspire hope, produce steadfastness, and good works.

Second, *its nature*: a tribute of praise. In this prayer, the apostle is not making supplication of God, but rather is offering adoration unto 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” 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 alway” (verse 4); and that rejoicing is to find expression in gratitude and by ascribing glory unto 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 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the echo—or better, the reflex—of His amazing grace toward them. This particular doxology is also to be regarded as a devout acknowledgment of the inestimable favours which God had bestowed on His elect in verse 3. As the apostle reflected upon the glorious blessings conferred on hell-deserving sinners, his heart was drawn out in fervent worship unto the benign Author of them.

Thus it should be, thus it must be, with Christians today. God has no dumb children (Luke 18:7). Not only do they “cry day and night unto him” 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 unto a living hope, as they anticipate by faith the glorious inheritance which is reserved for them in heaven, and as they realize these flow from the sovereign favour 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—see our September 1948 article for further remarks thereon. Concerning the particular term which is here used for “blessed,” Charles John (C. J.) Ellicott (1819-1905) most helpfully remarked that, “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*.” So minutely discriminating and accurate is the language of Holy Writ.

Third, *its Object*. This doxology is addressed to “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which is explained by John Calvin (1509-1564) 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 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 is the case with the Jews and the Turks [i.e. the Mohammedans, to which we may add ‘Unitarians’]. Whoever then seeks really to know the only true God, must regard Him as the Father of Christ.” More specifically: in Psalm 72:17, it was foretold of Christ that “men shall be blessed in him” and that “all nations shall call him blessed.” Whereupon the sacred singer broke forth in this adoring praise: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things” (Psa. 72:18). That was the Old Testament form of doxology (compare 1 Kings 1:48; 1 Chron. 29:10); but the New Testament doxology (Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3) is expressed in accordance with the 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 which were pleasing in His sight. By God’s Word, He was regulated in all things. Jehovah was His “portion” (Psa. 16:5), His “God” (Psa. 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 He was here on earth, but so now in heaven. This is clear from His promise after the 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). Yet this *official* subordination of Christ unto God the Father in no wise militates against nor modifies His *essential* equality with Him (John 5:23; 10:30).

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 relation to us is determined by His relation to our Surety. He is the God and Father of sinners only in Christ. He is adored as the covenant Head of the Saviour and of His elect in Him. This is a point of first importance: the connection which the Church sustains to God is fixed by that of the Redeemer’s to God, for She is Christ’s and Christ is God’s (1 Cor. 3:23). The “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the peculiar and characteristic *Christian* designation of Deity, contemplating Him as the God of *redemption*: Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 11:31; Colossians 1:3. When an Israelite called upon 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 unto 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 Saviour of sinners, the sole Mediator between God and men.

The language in which God is here worshipped *explains* how He is so kind and bounteous unto 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 (Jam. 1:17). The Highest is “kind unto the unthankful and 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 unto a living hope, and of an inheritance which infinitely transcends all earthly good. And in the bestowment of these favours, God is 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.

Fourth, *its ascription*: “His abundant mercy.” As God does not elect because He foresaw any would savingly repent and believe the Gospel—for these are the effects of His invincible call, which 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 sovereign pleasure (Jam. 1:18). His abundant mercy is here set over against our abundant demerits, and in proportion as 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.

“No other attribute could have helped us had mercy refused. As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon us, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatenings 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”—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892).

“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” (1 Pet. 1:3). The Deity is here viewed as the covenant Head of the Mediator, and of God’s elect in Him, being accorded His distinctive *Christian* title (Eph. 1:3, etc.). 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), that “great is thy mercy” (Psa. 86:13), that He is “plenteous in mercy” (Psa. 86:5), of His “manifold mercies” (Neh. 9:27), yea, of “the multitude of thy mercy” (Psa. 5:7). Blessed be His name, “His mercy endureth for ever” (Psa. 107:1). Well, then, may each believer join with the Psalmist in saying, “I will sing aloud of thy mercy” (Psa. 59:16). To this attribute especially should erring saints look: “According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psa. 51:1).

It requires to 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” (Psa. 145:9), and therefore, the discerning eye perceives, “The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy” (Psa. 119:64); yet that is something very different from God’s benignity unto His elect. By way of eminency, Christ is denominated “to perform *the mercy* promised to our fathers” (Luke 1:72). “For thy mercy is great above the heavens” (Psa. 108:4 and compare Eph. 4:10), for *there* His “mercy seat” is found, upon which sits the exalted Saviour 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 Saviour: reject Him, and divine condemnation is inescapable.

Very expressly is the mercy here celebrated by Peter a particular and discriminating one. It is that of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and it flows to its favoured objects “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:” between *those* two clauses is the statement, “Which 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.” It is so if we consider the Bestower: it issues from the self-sufficient Jehovah, who is infinitely and immutably blessed in Himself, and who had therefore 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. So, too, when we contemplate the nature of its blessings: not the common and temporal ones—such as health and strength, sustenance, and preservation—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: the “resurrection of Jesus Christ,” which necessarily presupposes His incarnation and crucifixion. What other language could be appropriate to express the Father’s sending forth of His well-beloved to take upon Him the form of a servant, assume unto Himself flesh and blood, and be born in a manger, 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, for as the Psalmist declares, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa. 85:10). It was at the Cross the seemingly conflicting attributes of mercy and justice, love and wrath, and holiness and peace, are all united, as the various colours of the light when separated by a prism are seen beautifully blended together in the rainbow—the token and emblem of the covenant (Gen. 9:12-14; Rev 4:3).

But we must next consider, fifth, *the incitement* of this doxology: “Which 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 which moved Peter to bless Him so fervently. The expression “hath begotten us” has reference to their regeneration: later in the chapter, the apostle describes them as being “born again” (verse 23), and in the next, addresses them as “newborn babes” (1 Pet. 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 the transforming of the conduct. God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, thereby communicating a

holy disposition—termed “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15)—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. 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 “begotten us *again*,” there is a twofold allusion: a comparison and a contrast. First, as God is the efficient cause of our being, so also of our wellbeing: our natural life comes from Him, and so too does our spiritual life. Second, to distinguish our new birth from the old one. At our first begetting and birth, we were conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity (Psa. 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 Pet. 1:4). Henceforth there is a perpetual conflict within the believer: not only “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” but “the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). It is not sufficiently recognized and realized that the new nature or principle of grace 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 declares, “I am found of them that sought me not” (Isa. 65:1 and compare Rom. 3:11). As believers love Him because He first loved them (1 John 4:19), so they did not become seekers after Christ until He first sought and effectually called them (Luke 15:4; John 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 which the elect receive of God’s love unto 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” (Tit. 3:4, 5). As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) 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 we are experientially made God’s children, received into His favour, and conformed unto 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 that guarantees our justification and glorification (Rom. 8:29, 30).

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 he have any spiritual apprehension or appreciation 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, and has no confidence in the flesh. Equally true is it that no unregenerate person ever has his conscience sprinkled with the peace-producing blood of Christ, for until spiritual life be imparted, evangelical repentance and saving faith are morally impossible, and therefore, there can be no realization of our desperate need of a Saviour or any actual trusting in Him. Still more evident is it that so long as a person remains dead in sin, with his mind enmity against God, there can be no acceptable obedience unto Him, for He will neither be imposed upon nor bribed by rebels. And certain it is that none

who are of the world and in love with its painted baubles will conduct themselves as “strangers” in this scene.

“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 which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. Hope always respects something future (Rom. 8:24, 25), being an eager expectation of something desirable, an anticipation of a promised good—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 “religion,” then they will seek to persuade themselves of and look forward to something far better for them 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.

In contradistinction from the delusive expectations cherished by the unregenerate, God’s elect are begotten again unto a real and substantial hope—that is, *subjectively* so, for their objection hope is described in the next verse. In the majority of instances, the Greek adjective is translated “living,” though in Acts 7:38 (as well as in our text), it is rendered “lively.” We shall therefore give it both meanings. The Christian’s hope is a “sure and stedfast” 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), the fruit of the Spirit, 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, and because it has “eternal life” for its object (Tit. 1:1, 2); whereas before we were begotten of God, there was “a certain fearful looking for of judgment” (Heb. 10:27), through fear of death “being all [our] lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15). It is also termed “a living hope,” because it is imperishable, one which looks and lasts beyond the grave. Should death overtake its possessor, so 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 unto 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 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 which 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 seeking satisfaction in spiritual objects, and by energizing to the performance of spiritual duties. The genuineness and reality of that “lively hope” is, in turn, evidenced by its producing a readiness unto the denying of self and enduring afflictions, acting as “an anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19) amid the storms of life. It further evidences 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 subjects, for as he views the blissful goal, courage is imparted and inspiration afforded for him to endure unto the end of his trials.

We come now to consider, sixth, *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 each of the preceding clauses, as well as the verse that follows. Equally obvious, it is that the resurrection of Christ

implies His previous birth 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, of His bringing us from death unto life, of His putting into our hearts a living hope, and of His bringing us into a glorious inheritance, is a very real and intimate one, and calls for our devout attention. The Saviour's rising again from the dead was the climacteric proof of the divinity of His mission and ratification of His Gospel. It was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Him, and thus evinced 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 contest between Him and the Jews: they condemned Him to death as an impostor, but by restoring the temple of His body in three days, He demonstrated them to be 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 which is set before His people. His emerging in triumph from the tomb furnished indubitable proof of the efficacy of His propitiatory sacrifice: that it had not only put away the sins of those for whom it was offered, but had brought in an everlasting righteousness, and therefore, had secured for them the award of a fulfilled Law. He who was delivered up to death for our offences was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25). As John Brown (1722-1787) pointed out: "When God 'brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant' (Heb. 13:20), He manifested Himself to be 'the God of peace,' the pacified Divinity. He 'raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God' (1 Pet. 1:21). 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 might give eternal life to as many as the Father hath 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 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.” “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)—i.e. to administer redemption.

Yet more specifically. The resurrection of Christ is not only the meritorious cause of the believer’s justification, but of his regeneration, too, with all that that ensures. This is a point of deep importance, though, like many a similar one, little understood today. The soul must be brought from its death in sin before the body can be raised in glory, and while the Holy Spirit is the One who quickens God’s elect; yet it must be remembered that He proceeds from the risen Christ as the reward of His finished work (Acts 2:33). In James 1:18, the new birth is traced back to the sovereign will of the Father. In Ephesians 1:19, it is

predicated of the working of His mighty power. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, it is attributed unto 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 (Psa. 2:7, compared with Acts 13:33), while our resurrection is designated a "regeneration" (Matt. 19:28). Christ is expressly called "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5); and He is so, because resurrection was a "begetting" of a new beginning—both for Him and for His people.

"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 by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). It is to be recalled that this epistle is addressed unto those who are "strangers scattered" abroad (1 Pet. 1:1). Most fitting then was this reference to the divine begetting of God's elect, for it is thereby they are made such, both in heart and in conduct. The Lord Jesus was a Stranger here (Psa. 69:8), for He was the Son of God from heaven; and so too are His people, for they have His Spirit within them. How that enhances this miracle of grace! Divine begetting is not only a doctrinal fact, but the actual communication to the soul of the very life of God (John 1:13). Formerly the Christian was both "in" and "of" the world, but now his "conversation [citizenship] is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and "I am a stranger in the earth" (Psa. 119:19) is henceforth his confession. To the soul renewed by God, this world becomes a barren wilderness: his heritage, his Home, is on high; and therefore, he now views the things of time and sense in a very different light from what he did before.

The chief interests of a born-again soul lie not in this mundane sphere. His affections will be set upon things above, and in proportion as they *are* so, his heart is detached from this world. Their strangership is an essential mark which distinguishes the

saints from the ungodly. They who heartily embrace the promises of God are suitably affected by them (Heb. 11:13). One of the certain effects of divine grace in the soul is to separate its possessor, both in spirit and in practice, from the world. His delight in heavenly things manifests itself in a weanedness from the things of earth—as the woman at the well left her bucket when she obtained from Christ the living water (John 4:28). Such a spirit constitutes him an alien among the worshippers of mammon. He is morally a foreigner in a strange land, surrounded by those who know him not (1 John 3:1); neither understanding his joys or sorrows, nor appreciating the principles and motives which actuate him, for their pursuits and pleasures are radically different from his. Nay, he finds himself in the midst of enemies who hate him (John 15:19), and there is none with whom he can have communion, save the very few who have “obtained like precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1).

But though there be nothing in this wilderness-world for the Christian, he has been “begotten...again unto a lively hope” (1 Pet. 1:3). Previously, he viewed death with horror, but now he perceives it will provide a blessed release from all sin and sorrow, and open the door into Paradise. The principle of grace received at the new birth not only inclines its possessor to love God and act faith on His Word, but also to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:18), inclining his aspirations away from the present unto the glorious future. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) said, “The new nature was made for another world: it came from thence, and it carrieth the soul thither.” *Hope* is an assured expectation of future good. While faith is in exercise a vista of unclouded bliss, it is set before the heart, and hope enters into the enjoyment of the same. It is a living hope in a dying scene, which both supports and invigorates. While in healthy activity, hope not only sustains amid the trials of this life but lifts us above them. O for hearts to be more engaged in joyous anticipations of the future: they will quicken unto duty and

stimulate unto perseverance. According to the intelligence and strength of hope will be our deliverance from the fear of death.

A further word must now be said upon the relation which “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” bears to the Father’s begetting us unto this living hope. His God-honouring work and triumphant emergence from the grave was the *meritorious cause* not only of the justification of His people, but of their regeneration also. Mystically, they were delivered from their death in law when their Surety arose: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us *together with* Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together” (Eph. 2:4-6). Those words refer to the corporate union of the Church with the Head and her judicial participation in His victory, and not to an individual experience. Nevertheless, since all the elect rose federally when their Representative arose, they must in due time be regenerated; since they have been made alive legally, they must in due course be quickened spiritually. Had not Christ risen, none had been quickened (1 Cor. 15:17); but because He lives, they shall live also. The life that is in the Head must be communicated unto the members of His body.

The resurrection of Christ is the *virtual* cause of our regeneration. The Holy Spirit had not been given unless Christ had slain the last enemy and gone to the Father: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:13, 14). Regeneration issues as truly from the virtue of Christ’s resurrection as does our justification. He purchased for His people the blessed Spirit to raise them up to grace and glory: “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Tit. 3:5, 6)—i.e. because of His merits and mediation. The Holy Spirit is here to testify of Him to God’s elect, to raise up faith in them to Him that they “may abound in hope” (Rom.

15:12, 13). Our spiritual deliverance from the grave of sin's guilt and pollution is as much owing to the efficacy of Christ's triumph over death as will be our physical vivication at His return. He is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

The resurrection of Christ is also in the *exemplary pattern* of our regeneration. The same power put forth in raising Christ's body is employed in the recovering of our souls (Eph. 1:19). The Lord Jesus is designated "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5), because His emerging from the grave was not only the pledge, but the likeness of both the regeneration of the souls of His people and the raising of their bodies. The similitude is obvious. Begetting is the beginning of a new life. When Christ was born into this world, it was "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3)—clothed with infirmity because of imputed iniquity; but when He rose in power and glory, it was in a body fitted for heaven: at regeneration, we receive a nature which makes us meet for heaven. As God's raising of Christ testified to His being pacified by His sacrifice (Heb. 13:20), so by begetting us again, He assures us of our personal interest therein. As Christ's resurrection was the grand proof of His divine Sonship (Rom. 1:4), so the new birth is the first open manifestation of our adoption. As Christ's resurrection was the first step into His glory and exaltation, so regeneration is the first stage of our entrance into all spiritual privileges.

Seventh, *its substance*: "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for [us]" (1 Pet. 1:4). Regeneration is in order to glorification. We are begotten spiritually unto two things: a living hope in the present, a glorious heritage in the future. It is by God's begetting that we obtain our title to the latter. Inheritances go by birth: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). If not sons, there can be no heirship, and we must be born of God in order to become (vitaly) the children of God. But "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Not only does

begetting confer title, but it also guarantees the inheritance. Already, the Christian has received the Spirit “which is the earnest of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14). As Christ’s part was to purchase, so the Spirit’s part is to make it known unto the heirs: “The things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” He “hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). It is the Spirit’s province to vouchsafe the regenerate sweet foretastes of what is in store for them, to bring something of heaven’s joy into their souls on earth.

Not only does divine begetting give title to and ensure the inheritance, but it also imparts a *meetness* for the same. At the new birth, a nature is imparted which is suited to the celestial sphere, which qualifies the soul to dwell for ever with the Holy One (as is evident from his present communion with Him), and at the close of his earthly pilgrimage, indwelling sin (which now hinders his communion) dies with the body. It is all too little realized by the saints that at regeneration, they are at once fitted for heaven. Many of them—to the serious diminution of their peace and joy—suppose that they must still pass through a process of severe discipline and refining ere they are ready to enter the courts above. That is but another relic of Romanism. The case of the dying thief, who was taken immediately from his spiritual birthplace into Paradise, should teach them better. But it does not. So legalistic remains the heart even of a Christian that it is very difficult to convince him that the very hour he was born again, he was made as suitable for heaven as ever he would be, though he remained on earth another century; that no growth in grace or passing through fiery trials is essential to prepare the soul for the Father’s House.

Nowhere does Scripture say that believers are “ripened,” “meetened,” or “gradually fitted” for heaven. The Holy Spirit expressly declares that God the Father hath “according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again...to an inheritance” (1 Pet. 1:3, 4). What could be plainer? Nor does our text by any means stand alone. Christians have already been made



“partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), and what more can be needed to fit them for the divine presence? Scripture emphatically declares, “If a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7). The inheritance is the child’s birthright or patrimony. To speak of “heirs” not being eligible for an estate is a contradiction in terms. Our fitness for the inheritance lies alone in our being the children of God. If it be true that “except a man be born again, he cannot see [or enter] the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5), then conversely, it necessarily follows that once he *has been* born again, he is qualified for an entrance into and enjoyment of God’s kingdom. All room for argument thereon is excluded by “giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12)—see our article thereon in the June 1947 issue.

By regeneration, we are made vitally one with Christ and thereby become “joint-heirs” (Rom. 8:17) with Him. The portion of the Bride is her participation in that of the Bridegroom: “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them” (John 17:22) declares the Redeemer of His redeemed. This too needs stressing today when so much error is parading itself as the Truth. In their fanciful attempts to “rightly [divide] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), men have wrongly divided the family of God. Dispensationalists hold that not only is there a distinction of earthly privileges, but that the same distinctions will be perpetuated in the world to come, that the New Testament believers will look down from a superior elevation upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that saints who lived and died previously to Pentecost will not participate in the glory of the Church or enter into the inheritance “reserved in heaven for [us]” (1 Pet. 1:4). To affirm that those of this Christian era are to occupy a higher position and enjoy grander privileges than will those of previous ages is a serious and inexcusable mistake, for it clashes with the most fundamental teachings of Scriptures concerning the purpose of the Father, the redemption of Christ,

and the work of the Spirit, and repudiates the essential features of God's "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3).

All of God's elect are the common-sharers of the riches of His wondrous grace, vessels he afore prepared "unto glory" (Rom. 9:23), whom He predestinated to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Christ acted as the Surety of the entire election of grace, and what His meritorious work secured for one of them, it necessarily secured for all. The saints of all ages are fellowheirs: each of them was predestinated by the same Father (John 10:16), each of them was regenerated by the same Spirit (2 Cor. 4:13), each of them looked unto and trusted in the same Saviour. Scripture knows of no salvation which does not issue in joint-heirship with Christ. Those to whom God gives His Son—namely, the whole company of His elect from Abel to the end of earth's history—He also "freely [gives them] *all things*" (Rom. 8:32). That both Abraham and David were justified by faith is plain from Romans 4, and there is no higher destiny or more glorious prospect than that to which justification gives full title. The work of the Holy Spirit is identical in every member of God's family: begetting them to, qualifying them for, a celestial heritage. All those who were effectually called by Him during the Old Testament era received the promise of "eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). Heaven-born children must have a heavenly portion.

A few words now upon that heavenly portion. It is one that is agreeable to the new life received at regeneration: a state of perfect holiness and happiness suited to spiritual beings united to material bodies. Many and varied are the descriptions given in Scripture of the nature of our inheritance. "Salvation" (Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5) in its fullness and perfection, bestowed upon the redeemed at Christ's return. The "Father's house [with its] many mansions," which the Saviour is now preparing for "his own" (John 14:1, 2). "The inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), the purchased possession of the "the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5). "A city which hath foundations, whose

builder and maker is God,” unto which Abraham’s faith and hope looked (Heb. 11:10), and which is depicted in Revelation 21:10-27. “A kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28), even “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). God’s “eternal glory” unto which He has called us (1 Pet. 5:10), particularly as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24). “The paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7), of which Eden was but a shadow, and in which there is provided “fullness of joy...pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11).

“The celestial blessedness here, and in many other passages of Scripture receives the appellation of ‘an inheritance’ for two reasons—to mark its gratuitous nature, and to mark its secure tenure. An inheritance is something that is not obtained by the individual’s own exertions, but by the free gift or bequest of another. The earthly inheritance of the external people of God was not given them because they were greater or better than the other nations. It was because ‘the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them’ (Deut. 10:15 and compare Psa. 44:3). And the heavenly inheritance of the spiritual people of God is entirely the gift of sovereign kindness: ‘the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom. 6:23). Again; no right is more indefeasible than the right of inheritance. If the right of the giver or bequeather be good, all is secure. The heavenly happiness, whether viewed as the gift of the divine Father or the bequest of the divine Son, is ‘sure to all the seed’ (Rom. 4:16). If the title of the claimants be but as valid as the right of the original proprietor, their tenure must be as secure as the Throne of God and of His Son”—John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787).

The *excellence* of this “inheritance” or everlasting portion of the redeemed is described by three words. First, “incorruptible,” and thus, it is like its Author: “The incorruptible God” (Rom. 1:23). All corruption is a change from better to worse, but

heaven is without change or end. Hence, “incorruptible” has the force of enduring, imperishable. Nor will it corrupt its heirs, as many a worldly one has done. Second, it is “undefiled;” and thus, it is like its Purchaser, who passed through this depraved world uncontaminated (Heb. 7:26), as a sunbeam is unsullied, though it shines on a filthy object. All defilement is by sin, but no germ of it can ever enter heaven. Hence, “undefiled” has the force of beneficent, incapable of injuring its possessors. Third, it “fadeth not away;” and thus, it is like the One who conducts us thither: “the *eternal* Spirit” (Heb. 9:14)—the Holy Spirit, “pure river of [the] water of life” (Rev. 22:1). “Undefiled” tells of its perennial and perpetual freshness: its splendour will never be marred, nor its beauty diminished. “Reserved in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:4) tells of the location and security of our inheritance: see Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:18.

Putting together the four descriptive terms, we are shown, first, the *nature* of our inheritance—indestructible. The substance of every earthly grandeur wears away; the mightiest empires eventually dissipate by reason of inherent corruption. Second, its *purity*: no serpent shall ever enter this paradise to defile it. Third, its changeless *beauty*: no rust shall tarnish or moth mar it, nor shall endless ages produce a wrinkle. Fourth, its *security*. It is guarded by Christ for His redeemed: no thief shall ever break into it. More specifically: it seems to us there is here a designed series of contrasts. First, from the inheritance of Adam: how soon was Eden corrupted! Second, from the inheritance which the Most High “divided to the nations” (Deut. 32:8), which one and all have defiled by greed and bloodshed. Third, from the inheritance of Israel: how sadly the land of milk and honey wilted under the droughts and famines, which the LORD sent on it for their sins. Fourth, from that of the fallen angels, in heaven itself, who “kept not their first estate” (Jude :6), having no High Priest to intercede for them.

The apostle’s reference to the heavenly heritage of believers was a most appropriate one. He was writing to those who

were—both naturally and spiritually—away from their homeland, aliens in a strange country. Many of them were converted Jews, and, as such, fiercely opposed and most cruelly treated. When a Jew became a Christian, he forfeited much: excommunicated from the synagogue, he became an outcast from his own people. Nevertheless, there was rich compensation for him. He had been divinely begotten unto an inheritance infinitely superior, both in quality and duration, to the land of Palestine: thus his gains far more than made up for his losses. The Holy Spirit, then, from the outset of the epistle, drew out the hearts of those suffering saints unto God by setting before them His abundant mercy and the exceeding riches of His grace. According as they were occupied with the same would their minds be lifted above this scene and their hearts filled with praise unto God. While few of *us* are experiencing any trials comparable with *theirs*, yet our lot is cast in a very dark day, and it behoves us to look away from the things seen and more and more fix our attention upon the blissful future awaiting us. Since God has designed such for us, how we should glorify Him!

The third of seven booklets.

