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A Theology of the New Birth, Part 2

Of all the truths to encourage a persecuted people, why did Peter choose the New Birth as his first word of encouragement? In John 3:3, Christ said, "...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Christ is talking here about the New Birth.

On account of the Fall, alienation, estrangement, and death descended upon this world such that mankind NOT only became enemies of God, BUT literally died!

Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Now there is much to the “death” that came as a result of our sin. On account of Adam’s sin, mankind died:

1. Spiritually — fallen man is alienated from God. In our natural state, we hate God and want nothing to do with Him.
2. Morally — which means depravity is that which now characterizes us. We lack purity; we are not devoted to God; and have no understanding when it comes to the Lord or the things of the Lord!
3. Physically — the moment Adam ate of the fruit, this world, including man, became subject to decay.
4. Eternally — the ultimate end of Adam’s rebellion is an eternity separated from God in which the rebel suffers the unabated pains of hell forever!

That’s the death that came as a result of sin! Yet God in His grace reverses all of this! The first thing He does in time when He deigns to save an individual is that He regenerates them; He vivifies them; He brings that which was dead back to life! All of this is what is meant by the New Birth!

Now we saw that one of the first symptoms of this New Birth is being alive to God! The non-Christian is on a passionate, destructive, and mad pursuit *AWAY* from God! Speaking of the unbeliever, Paul said this:

Romans 1:22-23, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

The New Birth changes this such that now the individual has a longing, appetite, desire, and passion *FOR* the Lord! The believer no can “see the kingdom of God!” (John 3:3c)

Do you understand what this means? If you have any inclination for God — any appetite to be in His presence, to honor His name, to serve Him, and so to be used by Him — though your sins may be great, nevertheless you bear in your person evidence of a resurrection, a regeneration... a New Birth!

Jeremiah 31:34a, ““And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord...”

Now when it came to encouraging a people of God facing severe persecution, it was with this that Peter encouraged them: They had been born again!

1 Peter 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...”

In light of this, what ought to be our response? For this we turn to the aim of the New Birth; the praise and glory of God’s name!

1 Pete 1:3a, “blessed be the God and Father¹ of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Aim of the New Birth is found in the very first word of this verse, “blessed.” It comes from εὐλογητός (*eulogētos*) which is where we get the English word “eulogy.” A eulogy is a speech which seeks to honor a dead individual by praising them.

While that is NOT the sum total of the word as used here, nevertheless the definition points us in the right direction. The word is used throughout the Bible (especially in the Old Testament) to denote worship.

Psalm 103:1-5, “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, *ble*ss His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things, *so that* your youth is renewed like the eagle.”

Most if not all of you know the definition of “worship.” *Worship* is to ascribe to God worth on account of His person and work — which is what David is doing here as he references the fact that God pardons, heals, redeems, crowns, and satisfies! In light of these blessings and more, God most certainly is worthy to be praised.

Now in this context, what is the word David used to command His soul to give such adoration? “Bless the Lord, O my soul...” From this I hope you see that to “bless the Lord” is to worship Him! Notice with me how John describes the end times:

Revelation 5:13, “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

Christian, did you know that there is going to come a time when the existence of “every created thing” will be for the worship and so the praise of God? At this time, all of creation ill abound with “honor,” “glory,” and the longing for God alone to have “dominion”! Now parallel with these terms of praise is the word, “blessing.”

From this we see again that “blessing the Lord” is one and the same as worshiping/adoring His name! That is the end and so the ultimate purpose of the New Birth! And yet, there is more to be said here. Consider that James wrote about the wickedness of our tongue:

James 3:9a, “With it we bless *our* Lord and Father; and with it we curse men...”

Here as we might expect the word is used to refer to the activity of thanking, praising, honoring, and glorifying God. And so once and again we see that it involves worship. And yet based on its antonym/opposite, we note that it goes one step beyond worship.

Clearly “blessing” here is the opposite of the fleshly use of our tongue, which is “cursing”. What does it mean to “curse” (καταράομαι [*kataraomai*])? By definition, when a person curses or invokes a curse, they do two things:

1. They call upon a god/force to bring harm and destruction upon another individual or people.
2. They work toward that ill in the cursed person’s life!

In this regard as “blessing” is used in contrast to “cursing” we conclude that to “bless” is NOT ONLY to honor or worship God, BUT to work so that others might honor/worship the Lord.

That is God’s aim when it comes to the New Birth! God reversed the effects of the Fall in your life that you NOT only would praise Him, BUT that you might so live that others might praise Him too!

Now you tell me: In what environment will the worldling be moved by our actions to praise the Lord?

- When our life is easy? When we get everything we want?... *and we remain true to God?*
Or
- When our life is difficult? When we are persecuted? When everything they hold dear is threatened?... *and we remain true to God?*

It is the latter! And that firstly is why Peter’s first word of encouragement to a persecuted people was to remind them of the New Birth! This was the powerful message Peter gave to this persecuted church and it was very timely. They were Born Again that through the suffering in which they were embroiled they might honor the Lord and encourage others to do the same! Later in this epistle, Peter exhorted his persecuted brethren this way:

1 Peter 3:15a, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...”

As we have seen, the more the Christian is beaten, the better he smells! And eventually this will amaze the non-Christian! As such at times they will inquire, “*How can you continue to serve a God who has smitten you? What accounts for the hope that is in you?*” When this happens and we proclaim the excellencies of God, guess what? We are blessing the Lord and so fulfilling the aim for which we were Born Again!

Notice how Peter exhorted the persecuted brethren in Asia Minor:

1 Peter 2:12, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation [at the Last Judgment].”

That bring us now to the basis of the New Birth. What is it that provides for the New Birth?

1 Peter 1:3, “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy [not ‘out of’ but ‘according to.’ To give ‘out of’ my wealth is to give you 5 cents. But to give you ‘according to’ my wealth is to give you everything I have. God is NOT partial when it comes to salvation. If you are saved, God has as much ‘mercy’ for you as He does anyone else!] has caused us to be born again.”

The first thing Peter roots the New Birth in is the “mercy” of God. Mercy has two facets.

First mercy focuses on the sinner’s miserable, pitiful condition. Because of the rebellion of Adam at the Fall and so his consequent lust for:

- Autonomy — we are without help!
- Independency — we are without comfort!
- Pride — we are without true knowledge!
- Self-glory — we are without life!
- Rebellion — we are without hope!

How pitiful! In fact, Paul described this pitiful condition when he wrote this:

Ephesians 2:11-12, “Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands- *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (emphasis added)

Of all people, the sinner is in a pitiful condition! Truly, God’s mercy is an extension of God’s pity on account of our miserable condition!

Secondly, mercy involves a withholding! God’s mercy/compassion results in the sinner NOT getting what they deserve. The non-Christian deserves death on account of Adam’s rebellion against God.

Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death...”

- In a just universe, the reward that every sin must receive is death!
- That God would have mercy upon such rebellious ones is amazing when we consider...
 - It is man who is guilty!
 - Man does not deserve God's mercy!
- In fact, outside the demons who are unredeemable, the only part of creation that is rebellion against God is man!
- And the God who is showing mercy is a great, mighty, and awesome God (Psalm 8:1, 3-4)!

In this regard, when God in His mercy comes to a fallen world to address its fallen condition, what is the first thing He does? How does God's *redemptive* mercy translate to the sinner? It does NOT at first take him out of this fallen world. RATHER, it raises him from the dead — making him alive to God, His Kingdom, and so their glorious future! That is the point of our text here...

1 Peter 1:3b, "His great mercy" that "caused us to be born again..."

Don't miss it! The first act of *redemptive* mercy is the New Birth!

Ephesians 2:4-5a, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ..."

Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

Clearly it is the mercy of God that serves as the basis of our New Life! In this regard C. H. Spurgeon wrote this:

No other attribute could have helped us if mercy had refused. As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon us, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatening of the law, and wrath fulfills it. It is from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin. (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 1:3)

Hopefully you will understand that the Mercy/Compassion of God — and so His goodness — is directly responsible for the New Birth.

And yet, you would question God's goodness — His Mercy — when your circumstances aren't favorable? He did the colossal work of making a way for the sinner to be forgiven by dying on the cross. He then sent His Spirit to regenerate you, to revive you from the dead, such that now you know the Lord, love Him, and long to fellowship with Him. And yet in spite of all of this you are going to allow the ongoing existence of this state of sin and misery in which trial occurs to question whether or not God is good? Loving? Merciful?

Oh Christian, the fact that your first inclination in trial is to cling to God is a testimony of God's mercy in your life! Don't question it! Praise God for it!

So, it is God's mercy which initiates the New Birth. Notice that which secures it:

1 Peter 1:3, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

This verse alone ought to cause us to rethink our understanding of the resurrection of Christ. We celebrate it every Easter. And in fact, on Easter, it is frequently heard, "Every day in the life of the child of God is Easter!" Yet I wonder, how many of us understand what is involved in Christ's resurrection?

When we think of the Resurrection of Christ, we think of

- The empty tomb.
- A glorious beginning.
- ***and if we are Biblically literate*** the deity of Christ (Romans 1:4)- as it was Christ who Himself broke the power of death!

Throughout redemptive history many a person were raised from the dead. How is it that Christ's resurrection was different? Christ was NOT raised; HE ROSE all by Himself!

When the Jews sought a sign from Christ as to His authority to cast out the money changers from the temple, Christ said speaking of His body, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19b)

All of this is what we typically think when we reflect upon the Resurrection of Christ. Yet based on our text there is another facet to Christ's death and resurrection which is frequently missed, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!"

From this we conclude that Christ's death and resurrection was like a spiritual atom bomb which rather than destroying, brought with it super-abounding life!

You've seen the footage. When an Atom Bomb goes off, two things are most notable: the mushroom cloud and the shock wave. Of the two, it is the shock wave that has the greatest impact!



With Christ's resurrection, you must see that a shock wave was sent in time both forwards and

backwards invading this world with Resurrection power! Consider the following passages describing Christ's death and resurrection. Matthew recorded:

Matthew 27:50-53, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up *His* spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many."

The power that Christ exerted in giving up His life and then raising it up again was so great, it spilt over to many who were physically dead at the time! When doubt entered into the mind of John the Baptist who now was in prison, he sent some of his disciples to inquire if Christ truly was the Messiah:

Matthew 11:4-5: "And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the* blind receive sight and *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear, and *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them.'"

The coming of Christ brought with it Resurrection Power which for many- the blind, lame, leper, deaf, and dead- reversed the effects of Adam's sin! And that is why, throughout the Bible, the New Life is rooted and grounded in Christ's Resurrection! And thus we read these words by Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:20, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."

"First fruits" is a farming term. "First fruits" (1) are the first of the crop that is harvested. (2) Yet "first fruits" speak of more to come! The power that Christ exerted to raise Himself from the dead is that which raises the spiritually dead, giving them life!²

Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

Christ's resurrection power is that which gives life to the sinner causing him to live — yea, thrive — in a fallen world!³

All of this explains why, when Peter referenced the new birth, he rooted and grounded it in Christ's Resurrection!

So, of all the truths to encourage a persecuted people, this is why Peter started with the New Birth! Though we live in a harsh and hostile world, nevertheless as believers we will continue to grow! In fact, the only part of creation NOT subject to the decay of sin is the New Life God

implanted in us! Listen to the word of comfort Christ spoke to Martha at the death of her brother:

John 11:25-26, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"

Christian don't miss this glorious truth: "...if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him..." (2 Timothy 2:11b)! This is NOT just a promise... thanks to the Resurrection of Christ, it is a glorious reality!

The hymn is somewhat schmaltzy, nevertheless Bill Gaither was right on when he wrote the chorus:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!

References

Spurgeon, C. (2014). *Commentary on 1 & 2 Peter and Jude (Spurgeon Commentary Series)*. Titus Books.

End Note(s)

¹ MacArthur wrote, "Historically the Jews had blessed God as their creator and redeemer from Egypt. His creation emphasized His sovereign power at work and His redemption of Israel from Egypt His saving power at work. But those who became Christians were to bless God as the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ." (*1 Peter*, MNTC, p. 30)

² In fact the coming of Christ to this world represented nothing less than an in-breaking of the future age to this world! What is it that those in the first century beheld and partook of when they saw Christ? According to the Hebrew writer (Heb. 6:4-5a), they (1) "Tasted of the heavenly gift," (2) became "partakers of the Holy Spirit" - think of the feeding of the 5,000, and (3) "Tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come..."

³ Col. 2:13a: "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He

made you alive together with Him..."- Christ's resurrection is NOT only the prototype of our own, BUT that in which we participated when we were regenerated! In this regard notice: Christ's resurrection has not lost its power; it continues to bring the dead back to life!