

NOTES ON 1 PETER 1:3-5

* * * **KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD** * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!

AUDIENCE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT: The Apostle Peter is very specific regarding the audience he is addressing: "strangers" (lit., 'sojourners', those living in a land that is not theirs) who were scattered (lit., 'of the dispersion', from the Greek **διασπορα**) throughout specific provinces which were located in what we know today as northwestern Turkey (1Pet1:1). They are described as "elect" (1Pet1:2), so they are believers. This language clearly indicates that the audience is believing Jews (i.e., Jewish Christians) living in the Diaspora (outside the land of Israel). That believing Jews, in contrast to Gentiles, are the audience of this epistle, note 1 Peter 2:12, 4:3; this is consistent with Peter's designation as the apostle sent by God to minister particularly to "the circumcision" (Gal2:7-8). At the time of this letter (c. 65 AD; Nero is emperor of Roman Empire), these Jewish Christians were suffering under considerable persecution for their professed faith in Jesus Christ (1Pet1:6-7; 2:21), which was being portrayed as incompatible with their loyalty to Caesar and the empire¹. In this context, Peter offers no promise of physical deliverance. Rather, to encourage them, he grounds their hope in the immutable truth that the God who has regenerated them will also preserve them in their salvation irrespective of their earthly circumstances. That is, their salvation is eternally secured by the promise and power of God, not by their own faithfulness.

CHAPTER 1

PRAISE FOR GOD'S WORKS OF REGENERATION AND PRESERVATION

[3] Verses 3-5 are a single sentence in the original Greek. "Blessed [be] the God and Father" is the main (independent) clause of the sentence, with all that follows being relative clauses that modify or elaborate on "God" in some way. The Greek word translated "blessed" is **εὐλογητος**, which literally means "to speak well [of]" (the English word *eulogy* is a transliteration of this Greek word) and has the idea of "give praise [for]". In the NT, this Greek word is reserved for God alone. The remainder of this sentence, which runs through the end of v5, are clauses that give praise to God for his works of **regeneration** and **preservation** of the believer.

God is praised for having "begotten us again". This is God's work of regeneration in the believer; the human spirit, which is "dead in trespasses and sins", is "made alive" when one believes (Eph2:1). Here, this work of regeneration is "according to [God's] abundant mercy" (Tit3:5), whereas in Ephesians 2:8-9 it is attributed to

¹ Early in the first century Christians were immune from this charge as they were considered to be a sect of Judaism, which enjoyed a special dispensation in this regard within the Roman empire (cf. Acts18:12-17). By this time, however, Christianity had come to be viewed as a new religion distinct from Judaism, and as a consequence no longer benefited from the special status enjoyed by Judaism.

God's "grace". Grace and mercy are not precisely synonymous, but both emphasize an absolute exclusion of human works/merit.

One who has been regenerated (i.e., born again) has a "living hope". In N.T. usage, "hope" almost always has the idea of 'confident expectation that what God has promised, He will do' (Cp., Rom4:18-21). Here, the believer's hope is "living" in the sense that, even if he should die, he has God's promise to resurrect him, and that promise has been assured "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1Cor15:20-23). This is an important message for the Jewish Christians Peter is addressing, who are suffering persecution and many of which are likely facing death.

- [4] The believer's hope includes an "inheritance", which goes far beyond mere resurrection and eternal life; believer's are "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom8:17), who stand to inherit what Christ inherits (Ps2:8), and who look forward to reigning with Him (2Tim2:12; Rev5:10). This inheritance is "incorruptible", meaning it is not subject to decay or corruption (Cp., Matt6:19-20); it is "undefiled", meaning it is untarnished by the effects of the Fall (Cp., Rom8:18-23); and, it cannot "fade away", meaning it is eternal (it is as eternal as the very Word of God; 1Pet1:24-25). It is "reserved in heaven", the place where God's perfect will is done (cf. Matt6:10).
- [5] Here, the "who" of this relative clause hearkens back to the "us" in v3 (i.e., believers, recipients of the new birth). Believers are said to be "kept" (a present passive participle of $\phi\rho\upsilon\rho\epsilon\omega$, '[are] continually being guarded'), that is **preserved**. The believer's preservation is "by the power of God" (the efficient agency), "through faith" (the secondary cause), "unto salvation" (the result); for this reason it is sure and certain, depending on the promised work of God alone. This is one of the strongest assertions of the **eternal security** of the believer in his salvation to be found in the New Testament.

Eternal Security. In Arminianism, a believer can lose his salvation by falling into heinous or habitual sin. In Calvinism, a believer will persevere in faith and good works to the very end of his life; if he fails to persevere, it reveals he was not one of the elect. Both of these theological systems result in scenarios in which a genuine believer can never find rest, having confidence that he is saved and can never lose his salvation. The Bible teaches that the security of the believer in his salvation is a certain and gracious work of God (1Pet1:3-5). Only when salvation is by grace (Eph2:8-9)/mercy (Tit3:5), from beginning to end (i.e., justification, sanctification, glorification), can a believer have assurance and peace (Jn10:27-29; 20:31; 1Jn5:13).