

Born Again by the Resurrection

Easter, 2014

What causes us to be born again?

- The substitutionary death of our Lord?
- The witness of other believers?
- The Word of God?
- Our faith?
- Baptism?
- The work of God's Spirit in our hearts?

All of these are involved in our salvation. But Peter reminds us of a feature that we often overlook, the resurrection of our Lord:

1Pe 1:3 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 understand fully what Peter is saying, we must set this verse in its context. In this case, the context is not only the surrounding verses in 1 Peter, but also the writings of Paul, which Peter knows and on which he draws extensively.

Parallels with Paul (chart)

Peter knows of Paul's writings

In his second epistle, Peter will remind us of his debt to Paul:

2Pe 3:15 our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

We see this dependence at three levels: the overall chapter in which our text appears, the paragraph in which it is embedded, and the verse itself.

Chapter: Trinitarian Praise

In 1 Peter 1, “Vv. 3–5 have as their central figure the Father, vv. 6–9 the Son, and vv. 10–12 the Spirit who is at last given, who inspired the prophets of old and now inspires the Christian missionaries.”¹

Similarly, Eph 1 is trinitarian, marked by the recurring refrain “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14), and again moving from the Father (3-6) to the son (7-12) and then to the Spirit (13-14).

¹ Hart, J. The First Epistle General of Peter. In *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume V: Commentary* (41). New York: George H. Doran Company.

The Paragraph: The Order of Salvation

At the level of the paragraph, this verse borrows from a sequence of events that Paul has already spelled out in Romans 8 and 2 Thessalonians 2, describing the “order of salvation,” the sequence of events by which God saves sinners (chart).

Rom. 8:29,30	2 Thess. 2:13,14	1 Pet. 1:2-5
29a whom he did foreknow	13a brethren beloved of the Lord	2b according to the foreknowledge of God the Father
29b he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren	13b because God hath from the beginning chosen you	2a elect
30a whom he did predestinate, them he also called	13d through sanctification of the Spirit 14a he called you by our gospel	2c through sanctification of the Spirit
[implicit]	13e and belief of the truth	2d unto obedience
30b whom he called, them he also justified	13c to salvation	2e and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus· Christ
		v. 3
30c whom he justified, them he also glorified	14b to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ	4 an inheritance 5 salvation ready to be revealed in the last time

This sequence reaches from God’s loving relation with us in eternity past, through our salvation, and on to the coming glorious future he has planned for us. Our verse falls just after Peter has mentioned our salvation, and before he describes our coming glory. Peter starts with Paul’s sequence, but greatly embellishes the transition from justification to glorification.

This verse:

Our verse itself is a clear echo of Eph 2:4 (chart):

<p>Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy πλουσιος εν ελεει, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.</p>	<p>1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy το πολυ αυτος ελεος hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,</p>
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Application: This analysis helps us understand the context of our verse, but it also emphasizes another point that is worth mentioning. Peter experienced the resurrection first-hand. He heard the Lord predict his death and resurrection, saw the empty tomb, and met the risen Lord before the others of the twelve (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5). Yet he eagerly studies and adopts insights that the Spirit has recorded in Scripture through Paul. If even Peter, the most prominent of the original apostles, devotes himself so to what the Spirit has recorded in Scripture, how much more should we?

Verse by Verse Exposition

Now we turn to our verse itself.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,--Note two things about this clause.

First, the wording is identical with 2 Cor 1:3 and Eph 1:3, and appears only in these three places. Thus it furnishes yet another example of Peter's attention to the revelation given to Paul.

Second (chart), this is the main clause of the verse. The rest of the verse tells us what the God and Father of our Lord Jesus has done, to motivate us to bless him. This structure reminds us of the main purpose of our salvation, and indeed of our lives. It is not primarily our happiness, but his glory, as the Westminster divines recognized in the first question to the Shorter Catechism:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is **to glorify God** and to enjoy him forever.

hath begotten us again—The reason we bless God is that he has begotten us again. Only Peter uses this word (here and in v. 23, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible”). But his thought clearly comes from our Lord's words in John 3,

Joh 3:3 Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Recall where Peter puts this verse in the Order of Salvation. He has just come to the point where he speaks of our justification, by “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” He says more about the role of Christ's death in justification than Paul in either Romans or Thessalonians. Perhaps that is why he insists on the role of our Lord's resurrection in that process as well.

Now Peter sets forth three features of this new birth: its *motive*, its *destiny*, and its *mechanism*.

according to his abundant mercy.--The *motive* that moved God to beget us again is “his abundant mercy.” The expression here *πολυς ελεος* is the standard LXX translation of *רב חסד*, originating in Ex 34:6.² This expression is covenantal, describing an action based on God's pre-existing relation with us.

In our study of the fifth Beatitude (Matt 5:7), we distinguished this reciprocal mercy from one-way mercy, which might be motivated by the recipient's miserable condition or undeserving nature. Now, we were miserable in our sin, and totally undeserving, and other texts describe God's action toward us in terms of those characteristics, but that is not the theme here. Peter claims that God's action in begetting us again reflects a pre-existing relation with us.

At first glance this is surprising, but recall Peter's citation of the order of salvation. Our salvation begins, not in our movement toward God, but in his foreknowledge of us in eternity past. That foreknowledge is not a knowledge of facts, but his intimate knowledge of us as people. The word “to know” is used in this sense when we read that “Adam knew Eve his wife,” and in Thessalonians, Paul describes this step in the sequence as “beloved of God.” God begat us again as the expression of his loyal love toward us, even when we were sinners.

unto a lively hope—The *destiny* of our rebirth is not just life, but the hope of a glorious future. The next step in the order of salvation is our future glorification, which Peter sets forth as

2 Actually, the LXX merges the adjective and the noun into a single word that does not appear to be used elsewhere in Greek, *πολυελεος*.

Born Again by the Resurrection

1Pe 1:4 an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 ... salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter's readers, like many believers in the first century, suffered for their faith. He writes of "the trial of [their] faith" (v. 7), and says that they "are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (v. 6). But he encourages them to look to the future "praise and honor and glory" that they will receive "at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (v. 7). The death of Christ may explain their salvation from sin's penalty, but our Lord's resurrection after death will encourage them to look beyond their present suffering to the coming glory.

by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,--The third modifying phrase emphasizes the *mechanism* by which God has begotten us again. It is not the first thing most of us consider when we meditate on our salvation. Usually we think about the death of our Lord ("sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," v. 2), or the quickening Word of God ("being born again ... by the word of God," v. 23), or the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit giveth life," 2 Cor 3:6). But here Peter fixes our attention directly on the resurrection as the means of our rebirth.

The link between Christ's resurrection and our salvation is something else that Peter draws from Paul, who expresses this idea several times. Let's consider them briefly (chart).

In the *past*, Christ's resurrection is the essence and evidence of our salvation. Consider first the parallel of our verse in Ephesians.

Eph 2:4 God ... 5 ... hath quickened us together with Christ, ... 6 and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The heart of our salvation is our position "in Christ." We are dead to sin and alive to God because he died and rose, and we are identified with him.³ The *essence* of our new life is our participation in his life.

We can't directly see our salvation, but we can see his resurrection, which thus serves as *evidence* for our salvation.

Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was **raised again for our justification**.

"For" in these two clauses is *διὰ* with the accusative, meaning "because of" or "on account of." In Rom 4:25, The causality runs from our offenses to his delivery, and from our justification to his resurrection. The death of Christ proves the lethality of our sin, but if Christ were still dead, we would have no way of knowing that our sin was gone. If it could kill him, perhaps it can still kill us as well. As Paul says elsewhere,

1Co 15:17 if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.

Paul also connects the resurrection with our salvation in our *present* experience.

Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, **we shall be saved by his life**.

The reference is probably to our Lord's present intercessory ministry:

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is **able also to save** them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, **seeing he ever liveth** to make intercession for them.

³ Paul develops this idea in much more detail in Romans 6-7.

Born Again by the Resurrection

A dead Savior might have paid for our past sins, but he could not continually plead his blood in heaven's court against the accuser's slander. Because he rose from the dead, our Lord can deliver us throughout our earthly pilgrimage.

Finally, like Peter, Paul sees in Christ's resurrection a token of our *future* hope.

Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, **he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies** by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Peter says that we are begotten again “unto a living hope.” Christ's resurrection assures the believer's physical resurrection. We do not sacrifice physical gratification as believers; we look forward to an even richer physical experience in the coming kingdom of God on earth.

Let us bless God that he has begotten us again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Notes

Ευλογητος: Optative or Indicative?

NET tries to make it optative here, even though they take Paul's uses in Eph and 2 Cor (contrary to most other translations) as indicative.

Ευλογητος never appears in the Greek Bible with an optative form of εἶμι, but does appear often with the indicative (notably in Tobit and the Odes of Solomon), as well as Rom 1:25.

Semantically, one might expect the optative when the attribute is associated with God's gracious works, or with the response “amen,” indicating agreement, but even here the indicative is used.

But perhaps ευλογητος has the sense “worthy of blessing,” so that even with the indicative, the expression is volitional rather than declarative. Compare Ruth 2:20, where Naomi comments on the kindness of Boaz:

Rut 2:20 Blessed *be* he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.

The Hebrew, as is expected, has no verb, but Naomi's sentiment is clearly volitional rather than declarative. Yet LXX translates, ευλογητος εστιν τω κυριω. It appears that ευλογητος εστιν as a unit is volitional: “he is worthy of praise.”

Cf. the *Pual* participle מְהִלָּל in Ps 18:3 = 2 Sam 22:4, which is universally understood as “worthy of praise,” not simply “praised,” also in other places where the ptc is used. Contrast the use of the *Pual* indicative in a declarative sense in Ezek 26:17.