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The New Birth, Part 3

We live in a cause/effect world where most often the effects of an action are predictable. Yet not always. Years ago, the *Johnnie Walker Black Label* was the number one selling scotch whiskey in Japan; it was also the most expensive. Not happy with simply being number one, the marketing department of Johnnie Walker made the suggestion (which was followed) to lower the price per bottle of whisky. By doing so it was anticipated that the *Johnnie Walker Black Label* would take over the market in Japan!

Now, from an American point of view, one would think that lowering the cost per bottle would help increase sales. But it didn't. For, in Japan, the social status of a giver of a gift is tied to the price of the gift given. Accordingly, when Johnnie Walker lowered their price, the scotch no longer was the most expensive whiskey in Japan which meant that those wanting to portray a high social standing via a gift of alcohol no longer purchased the whiskey! So, by lowering their price, Johnny Walker's sales fell because they were not longer the most expensive gift! Interesting!

Many times, the unintended consequences of a decision or action are negative like the example I just gave you. But not always. Today we continue in our examination of 1 Peter 1:3-5 in which Peter gave his persecuted brethren in Asia Minor a theology of the New Birth. The positive results that flow from and accompany the New Birth are two referenced here. Notice that we have a living hope.

1 Peter 1:3d, "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."

Most have heard of what in theology is known as the Ordo Salutis/the Order of Salvation. The order of salvation comes from the examination of biblical passages which indicate the logical and at times, the temporal order of the normal workings of God when He saves an individual. When you do this, you arrive at the following description:

Divine Acts	Divine/Human Activity	Divine Acts	Divine/Human Activity	Divine Act
	(3) Repentance Unto Life	(5) Justification	(8) Progressive Sanctification	
(1) Effectual Calling thru (2) Regeneration	(4) Faith in Jesus Christ	(6) Def. Sanctification	(9) Perseverance in Holiness	(10) Glorification
		(7) Adoption		

From this logical progression, we understand that the result of *Regeneration*/the New Birth is *Repentance* and *Faith in Christ* which then results in *Justification*, *Definitive Sanctification*, and *Adoption*. Yet in the text before us, Peter is NOT concerned with the logical progression of salvation, BUT with its pastoral, temporal result in the life of the believer. And while no doubt there could be many named here, Peter identifies one that would be most relevant for a persecuted people... "hope"!¹

What is "hope"? Whereas in the English, hope implies doubt (we might *hope to win a prize*, but

there is no certainty), in the Kingdom of God “hope” references that which is a certainty! Biblical hope is NOT the prospect of what might happen, BUT the certainty of what is guaranteed! One of my favorite examples of this is found in Jeremiah 32.

Recall, Jeremiah began his ministry in 627 BC just prior to the Babylonian captivity of Judah. And so, his ministry from beginning to end was that of warning a people who wouldn’t listen. In fact, Jeremiah eventually would be killed in Egypt by the very people he sought to help! Now, Jeremiah had a cousin named Hanamel who owned some land. Yet in 587 BC, that land was occupied by the Babylonians who clearly weren’t going anywhere soon (in 586 BC they would conquer Judah).

Knowing that the fate of Judah looked quite dim, Hanamel conceived of a get rich scheme. With the Babylonians encamped on his land, the property was worthless... it couldn’t be farmed and most certainly no one would want to buy it. But then again, his cousin, Jeremiah, didn’t seem altogether there! If you know what I mean. For example, at one point in his adult life he walked 350 miles one way (three months) to the Euphrates river where he buried the underwear he was wearing. Then upon returning to Judah, he went back and retrieved the garment which by then was rotting (cf. Jeremiah 13:1-11)! And *a man this strange might be crazy enough to purchase Hanamel’s land!*

So Hanamel approached Jeremiah and told him of his desire to sell the property (Jeremiah had the “right of possession” [v. 8] being Hanamel’s closest relation). And shockingly, Jeremiah agreed to buy it! Why would Jeremiah do this?! Think of it: he knew that in short order (in fact, the very next year), Judah would be conquered by the Babylonians with most of its inhabitants being dragged into exile! Furthermore, he knew that at the age of 56, he most likely would not live long into the exile.

So why purchase a land he couldn’t use? Maybe, as most of his contemporaries thought, he was crazy! No! It wasn’t that Jeremiah was crazy or that he lost perspective. Rather, he purchased the land because of the confidence he had when it came to God’s plan for the future!

Jeremiah 29:10, “For thus says the Lord, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.’”

And so though an enemy nation occupied the land making it worthless, nevertheless Jeremiah had the *confident expectation* — the certainty — that God would restore His people at which time the land would be quite valuable! This is biblical hope!

It is living in light of a certain future! And so when it comes to the New life we have in Christ, the Bible is quite specific as to that which ought to govern our minds, impel us in ministry, and direct us in life as well death — it is the confident expectation that arises from the knowledge of God’s future plan for His people. Paul described one of the consequences of living in Christ:

Titus 2:13, "Look... for the blessed hope [which is] the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

When a person is born again, their entire world becomes directed to the future, and that time when Christ returns as a bride-groom to meet His bride, the people of God!

When Paul was before the Sanhedrin, we read this:

Acts 23:6b, "...Paul *began* crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope [the certain expectation of the] ...resurrection of the dead!'"

If there is anything you and I can be sure of in this life, it is that someday all in Christ will rise from the dead and so live with Him as His bride in a New Heavens and Earth! It is this hope that Peter is referencing when he said this:

Peter 3:13, "...according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

1 Thessalonians 5:8, "But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope [confident/certain expectation] of salvation."

Here "salvation" is being used in reference to our *glorification* (that is the consummation of our salvation, cf. the Ordo Salutis)! When Christ returns, He is going to "...transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory..." (Philippians. 3:21a)! And thus today all in Christ, "...exult in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2b)!

Truly, it is this confident expectation that all HAVE in Christ!² YET, it is NOT the confident expectation with which all in Christ LIVE... yet it ought to be! For notice the language with which Peter chose to modify "the hope" that is ours in Christ. He called it "a living hope"! This has three nuances.

1. Unlike the non-believer whose hopes all eventually die³- Proverbs 10:28b says that "...the hope of the wicked perish"- "the hope" we have in Christ is "living" and so will never die.⁴ Someday it will be realized. But until then, the hope we have in Christ is a certainty that will never pass away or diminish!
2. A "living hope" is a hope that impacts our living. From Scripture we learn that if Biblical hope is exercised on the part of the Christian, it will be:
 - a. A portal of rejoicing in the midst of sorrow (Hosea 2:15)!
 - b. That which will ground them and keep them where they need to be as Christians living in a state of sin and misery (Hebrews 6:19)!
 - c. A source of encouragement for the believer which will stay with them regardless of where they are or what they are experiencing (Hebrews 6:18).

- d. That which will fill them with joy (Romans 5:2), strengthen their faith (Hebrews 11:1), provide perseverance in their walk (Romans 5:3-5), and secure steadfastness in their service (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Hebrews 10-32-34: “But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.”

Spurgeon put it this way:

The swimmer who is ready to sink, if he sees a boat nearing him plucks up courage and swims with all his strength, because now he expects that his swimming will be of effectual service to him. The Christian amid the waves and billows of adversity retains his hope, a glorious hope of future bliss, and therefore he strikes out like a man toward the heavenly shore. Our hope buoys up the soul, keeps the head above water, inspires confidence, and sustains courage. (Spurgeon, 2014)

3. Lastly, because it is “living” it can be fed and so either increase or decrease over time! This is important.
 - a. The universe hates a vacuum. Accordingly, if you don’t occupy yourself with the hope that is ours in Christ, know that there are many substitutes in this world which are all too happy to pre-occupy us- like worry, anger, resentment and worldliness.
 - b. Christian, just as faith is a muscle that needs to be exercised, so is hope! If we don’t feed our hope, it will decrease AND the disposition which characterizes the worldling will take its place!

In this regard, how do we feed hope? Listen to a couple of passages starting with Colossians.

Colossians 3:1-2, “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

Family of God, this is NOT simply good advice, BUT a command! At any given moment you can focus on that which in this life you either have or don’t have. Or at any given moment you can focus on that which you have in Christ! Those who exercise the former will struggle in their walk. Those who give themselves to the Hope that is theirs in Christ will more and more be impervious to the crashing waves of life!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light

affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, [How so?] while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen [that is the exercise of Biblical hope]; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

How is it that Paul was impervious to the harshness of this world, calling it “momentary and light”? Because his focus was on “the things that are not seen” — specifically the coming Kingdom of God, the New Heavens and Earth, and the glorious life we shall live there!

1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [how is such living secured?], knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.”

When you and I gaze upon that which Christ has for us in eternity, we know all the toil we endure on account of the Lord in this life “is not in vain!” When this conviction controls, we become “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” We see it practically worked out in the Apostle Paul.

Christian, because you have been Born Again, because you have in you the New Life of Christ... you can live this way if you choose! Hope accompanies the New Birth, BUT it is NOT demanded by it! So, it comes down to what you will and will not value in this life!

Such was the message that Peter gave to his persecuted brethren in Asia Minor, the recipients of this epistle. They were in the crucible and so needed to be reminded that “...*they lose nothing who gain Christ.*” If this would be their focus, the trials and sufferings of this world would most certainly seem light!⁵

With this, Peter turns to a second result of the New Life which we’ll consider next time!

References

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

End Note(s)

¹ This fits the birth analogy in that birth, while wonderful, does not exist for itself but rather to start a child on its way to maturity and adult life.

² cf. Colossians 1:27.

³ cf. Job 8:13; Proverbs 10:28; Eph. 2:12.

⁴ cf. Ps. 33:18; 39:7; Romans 5:5; Eph. 4:4; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 6:19.

⁵ Peter Davids wrote, "Pastorally this future orientation is important for our author, for a suffering people who may see only more pain and deprivation ahead need to be able to pierce the dark clouds and fasten on a vision of hope if they are to stay on track. This hope is not a desperate holding-on to a faded dream, a dead hope, but a living one, founded on reality, for it is grounded in 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'" (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT, p. 52)