

God...BEGAT US AGAIN

B. G. ECHOLS

Peter opens his first epistle with words that would be of real value to Christians either being persecuted, or facing persecution. He seeks to prepare as well as encourage and comfort. They are God's elect; set apart for Him according to a plan He knew before the world began; cleansed by the blood of His Son to live obediently to Him. Thus grace and peace are theirs. Such a glorious position in God and Christ merits all the thanks and praise that can be given to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3). The word "blessed" means "worthy of all praise," and is used in the New Testament only in reference to God. God is praised for His mercy in making the new birth possible.

"GOD...BEGAT US AGAIN"

This results in a new life in us (2 Pet. 1:4). It began when we were baptized in harmony with the teaching of the word (Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). This deserves our thanksgiving to God because the new birth produces the hope of eternal life. It results in being filled with hope. Christians have a new birth, a new life, and a new hope. Every unconverted person is a hopeless creature (Eph. 2:12). The inheritance is only for those born again. All the rest will be shut out forever. But the new birth is only the first step. It is the beginning, not the end. It brings many benefits as well as duties.

"ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY"

All our blessings are because of God's mercy, not our merit (Titus 3:5). Thus we should bless Him. The best of men owe their best to the mercy of God (1 Pet. 2:10). Our hope is not from nature, but from God's grace and mercy. Our hope is undeserved, but motivated by God's love. Nobody is

saved by his own moral deeds. It is "His" mercy, not our goodness (Lam. 3:22). God, dominated by mercy, provided our redemption. It was not just mercy, but "great" mercy — abundant, plenteous, intense.

"UNTO A LIVING HOPE"

What is hope? "Hope" is a good word in the Christians' vocabulary (1 Pet. 1:21; 3:15; Acts 24:15; Titus 1:2). Our hope is alive, and it gives us life in that it encourages us to persevere. The hypocrite's hope dies with him. Hope has to be a strong motive for these people because they are not going to share earthly blessings, imperial honors, comfort, or a good name. They are going to be persecuted. Our life is not to be determined by our surroundings. Our hope is not dependent on our environment. Jesus was closer to ascending to glory when hanging on the cross than He was when the crowds welcomed Him to Jerusalem and cried hosannas at His presence.

Sometimes faith prospers most when it is most threatened. In fact, the days of pessimism have usually been days of comfort, not days of hardship and hostility. In our easy chairs we see chaos and sin gaining in the world, but on the battlefield we are more likely to see the light of Christ's glory. Often people think of serving God only in a reluctant or even grudging way. God desires willing, joyful service. Reflection upon the hope held out for Christians would develop thoughtful, thankful obedience in praise.

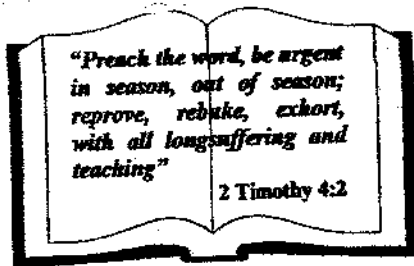
"BY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD"

This is the solid foundation upon which we build our hope. His resurrection shows that God

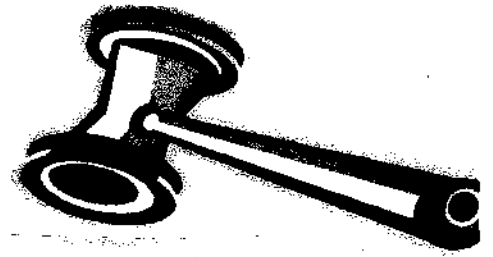
accepted His death as our ransom. He is victorious over death, the grave, and all our spiritual enemies. Thus His resurrection is an assurance of ours (Jn. 11:25). His resurrection is the guarantee of ours (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Our hope lives because He lives.

"UNTO AN INHERITANCE"

These people were poor and persecuted. They would lose much of their earthly goods. Yet they had something infinitely better (Psm. 16:5). Our inheritance is not our purchase, but the Father's gift. It is not our wages, but the result of grace. If we got a heaven we merited, it would be worse than any place we ever lived. Our inheritance is untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time (Heb. 9:15).



Give God the Final Verdict



PSYCHOLOGIST DAVID BURNS

notes that it is not another person's compliment or approval that makes us feel good; rather, it is our belief that there is validity to the compliment.

We are not passive victims of other's opinions. Their opinions are powerless until we validate them. No one's approval will affect us unless we grant it credibility and status. The same holds true for disapproval. (*The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, 157-158).

You have an imaginary jury box that you carry around inside your head. You allow the opinions of the jurors to pass judgment on your life. That group is likely made up of lots of people: parents, friends, teachers, co-workers, bosses, talented people, smart people, pretty people, spiritual people. To get past approval addiction you must place greater value on God's opinion of you than all those people. Somehow you must make the Lord the only one sitting in that jury box.

Paul, the author of 1 Corinthians, was able to pull this off. Some of the Christians in the church at Corinth made fun of him. Some disrespected him because in person he wasn't all that impressive. Here's what he wrote to them. This is an attitude we must adopt. "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

We can't completely get past other people's opinions, but we can give God the final verdict. If we are followers of Christ, His is the only opinion that counts.

—Joel Smith

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