

A PILGRIM'S MANUAL

A
PILGRIM'S
MANUAL

COMMENTARY ON

1 Peter

Herman Hanko



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To Wilma,
my fellow pilgrim

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Preface

MY FIRST INTEREST in Peter's first epistle came about during my years in seminary. Tuesdays and Thursdays always began with chapel, which consisted of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's exegesis from the Greek New Testament of particular books in the Bible. Among the books he treated during my first year in seminary was the first epistle of Peter. As a preacher, professor, radio speaker, and author, Herman Hoeksema's greatest gift was exegesis. Wholly committed to the infallible inspiration of Scripture and with a deep reverence for the word of God, he opened up the Scriptures to his students during his "chapel talks." As he took his students on an exegetical journey through 1 Peter, he held me spellbound. His exegetical ability and his sparkling explanations of the text created in me a fascination for the epistle that remains to this day.

Hoeksema's chapel talks were recorded on a fifty-pound wire recorder that did not always function as well as it should have. These recorded talks were later transcribed and printed as syllabi, which are available from the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In writing *A Pilgrim's Manual*, I relied heavily on Hoeksema's *Chapel Talks on 1 Peter* and frequently quoted from them to give the reader a taste of the delicious exegetical meals he served twice a week to his students. My hope and prayer is that through my commentary on 1 Peter the reader will have a sense of the debt owed to one of the spiritual fathers of the Protestant Reformed Churches, whose figure looms large behind what I have written.

During my early ministry, I preached a series of about thirty-five sermons on 1 Peter. This gave me opportunities to use my seminary professor's work and to develop my own exegesis and

thoughts on the epistle. Great truths are contained in the book. I think of such truths as regeneration, sanctification, glorification, the suffering of Christ for his people, the relation between Christ's suffering for them and his suffering in them, and many more. There are also passages that appear only in 1 Peter and are therefore difficult to understand. The important rule that Scripture interprets Scripture applies only negatively to them; other Scriptures tell us what these passages cannot mean. I refer, for example, to Christ's work through his Spirit in hell, to the flood as a picture of baptism, and to the definition of baptism as "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 3:19–21). To add to the list, the expression in 1 Peter 4:1 "For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" is a thought that requires some very careful explanation.

There are also passages that sharply underscore important doctrines that the church in our time no longer talks about and surely does not believe. I refer to the clear statement concerning those who are disobedient and stumble at the word, and about whom the apostle says, "Whereunto . . . they were appointed" (1 Pet. 2:8). There is no skillful playing with words that can get around this strong and unequivocal statement concerning reprobation.

These characteristics of the epistle, while making the work of exegesis hard, make it exciting. And the fruit of hard exegetical work is rewarding.

The epistle is particularly relevant to God's people who have forgotten what it means to be pilgrims and strangers in this earth. They have forgotten partly because of the false and unbiblical dreams of the postmillennialists, who hold out a kingdom of Christ in the world, and the utter nonsense of the "prosperity gospelers," who dream of faith in Christ as synonymous with riches and freedom from disease. We have in our Western culture forgotten to be pilgrims and strangers because we have become so attracted to this world and to the things of this world that we have lost sight of the world to come. We lay up treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven, something against which the Lord specifically warned in Matthew 6:18–20. It is true that where our treasures are, there are also our hearts.

We have for the most part found life in the world to be very

comfortable, so much so that we prefer not to leave it. We look carefully after our bank accounts, pension plans, new cars, houses, beautiful clothing, and vacation toys. Life is full of pleasure, and we have the means to make it so. We have insurance on our cars, health, possessions, and houses. We are covered for all possible calamities. We revel in our wealth, unaware of or not frightened by Paul's earnest warning of the snares of riches (1 Tim. 6:6–11). If we are pilgrims at all, the load of the things of this world is a burden too heavy to carry, if we desire to pursue our journey toward our heavenly home.

Peter does not deal much in his letter with the relation between the Christian pilgrim and the things of this earth. In a sense Peter does not have to remind the pilgrim of the proper use of this world's gifts. The startling truth is that if we walk as pilgrims ought to walk, we will be persecuted; and our freedom from persecution is frequently a testimony to our worldliness and materialism. Peter assumes that persecution belongs to the life of a pilgrim who is still on his journey. Again and again he returns to the subject of persecution in order to remind us that persecution is the lot of a pilgrim.

Because he is the object of persecution, the chief characteristic of the pilgrim is hope. His heart is set not on the things of this earth, but upon his heavenly and eternal inheritance. Hope pulls the Christian pilgrim toward the future with a certain implied dissatisfaction with life as it is, and with an impatience for the journey to be over. So much is hope dominant in the epistle that Peter has rightly been called "the apostle of hope."

To take seriously Peter's letter is to examine our lives in this world and to turn in repentance to God, seeking forgiveness for wandering in the dark forests of our present culture, and to implore him who controls all history that he will return us to the path that is made bright by the light that shines from our eternal destination. This may require persecution, if we are to be saved.

All in all, Peter answers the questions of life for us. Let us take his pilgrim's manual, inspired by the Holy Spirit sent from Christ, put it in our pockets as we pursue our journey, and read it at every opportunity. It shows the way.

A PILGRIM'S MANUAL



1 Peter 1

SALUTATION

1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
2. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1)

THE AUTHOR of this epistle is Peter, the disciple made an apostle. He was called from being a fisherman to become one of the twelve disciples. His name was changed from Simon, meaning impetuous and unsteady, to Peter, meaning rock.¹ He was given authority to speak the infallible word of Christ who sent him, and thus he was a part of the foundation of the church of all ages (Eph. 2:20–22).

1. The name Peter comes from *petros* (rock). Simon is the name his parents gave him. Scripture uses Simon to refer to the natural Peter apart from the sanctifying grace of Christ that made him a rock. See the narrative in Matthew 16, where after his confession in Caesarea Philippi, Christ said to Peter, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (vv. 17–18).

Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is one who is sent with a specific (divine) commission. The one qualification of an apostle was to be sent personally by the risen Lord. That he is “of Jesus Christ” means that Christ himself called, qualified, and commissioned Peter to be an apostle.² The office of apostle was unique in the history of the church. With the close of the New Testament canon about AD 100, the office of apostle ceased. The apostles held a special office because the infallible record of God’s revelation was not complete. In the same way that the prophets recorded infallibly God’s revelation in the old dispensation, the apostles completed the record in the new dispensation. Because they were the instruments of divine truth, for through them the Scriptures were inspired, and because their writings are the foundation of the church of all ages, the prophets and apostles are called the “foundation” (Eph. 2:20–22).

Peter was the spokesman of the apostles when Christ said to him, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” That rock is Peter’s confession. Along with the writings of the prophets and the other apostles, the Scriptures were given so that the church might be built on a firm foundation.

*To the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,
Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1:1)*

The Greek word translated as “strangers” Peter uses again in chapter 2, verse 11, where it is paired with a word translated as “pilgrims.”³ It is certain that the apostle refers to a spiritual, not

2. While the genitive “of Jesus Christ” can be a genitive of possession (Peter, the possession of Jesus Christ), it is more likely a genitive of source (Peter’s apostleship has its source in Jesus Christ who called and commissioned him).

3. The word translated as “strangers” is *parepidemois*, which comes from the preposition *para* (alongside of), the preposition *epi* (at), and *demos* (a people, a state). Hence the word means “foreigners,” those from another land who dwell with people of a nation or state not their own without becoming a part of it. Perhaps the better translation would be “foreigner” or “alien.” In 1 Peter

a physical, stranger or foreigner. The Christian is born again from heaven, and his homeland is heaven, where he lives. His citizenship is not first of all on earth, but in heaven (Eph. 2:19).⁴ From the viewpoint of his spiritual birth and heavenly citizenship, the regenerated child of God is a foreigner in this world. He has the life of heaven in his heart; he is the subject of King Jesus, who is ascended to God's right hand; he is a spiritual son of God and has his real home in glory; he speaks a different language from that of the world, a world that permeates its language with cursing, ribaldry, and blasphemy; he eats a different food, for he is fed and nourished with food and drink that feeds his soul; he can never adjust his way of life to the mores of the people in the midst of whom he lives. Because this foreigner, called also Christian, has a home in the country of his birth and in the land where his citizenship is found, he is also a pilgrim in the world. He spends some time here at his heavenly Father's command. How must he live? To that question the Holy Spirit through Peter gives a detailed answer. The Spirit gives the pilgrim a pilgrim's manual.

Because those to whom Peter writes are spiritual foreigners in this world, Peter does not refer to the Jewish diaspora when he speaks of "strangers scattered."⁵ Rather he refers to their living throughout the provinces of Asia Minor. The only province in Asia Minor absent from this list is Cilicia, where Tarsus, Paul's home town, was found.

2:11, the same Greek word used in 1 Peter 1:1 is translated as "pilgrims," to which the word *paroikos* is added, and which is translated as "strangers." The translation could be "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as boarders and foreigners." The word I translated as "boarders" is a Greek word that means "to dwell alongside of a family without being a part of it."

4. In Ephesians 2:19, the expression "strangers and foreigners" also appears. The word translated as "strangers" is a different word (*xenoi*, from which the English word *xenophobia* [fear of strangers] is derived) than Peter uses. But the word translated as "foreigners" (*paroikoi*) is the same word translated in 1 Peter 2:11 as "strangers."

5. "Strangers scattered" can be literally translated as "sojourners of the dispersion (*diaspora*) of Pontus."

*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God
the Father (1:2)*

Additional proof that verse 1 refers to spiritual strangers is that Peter calls these strangers "elect." They are the objects of eternal election, which is the eternal and unchangeable decree of God according to which he chose his people in Christ and destined them to live with him in the everlasting blessedness of his covenant.

The words "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" do not merely identify spiritual characteristics of the elect, but refer to the fundamental *cause* of their being strangers. They are strangers because they are elect and sanctified unto obedience and sprinkling.

These strangers are elect according to the "foreknowledge of God the Father." The word "foreknowledge" as applied to God's people in Christ is found elsewhere in Scripture, most notably in Romans 8:29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son"; and in Acts 2:23: "Him [Jesus], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

It is clear from Acts 2:23 that both foreknowledge and election belong to the counsel of God, although on Pentecost when Peter spoke of God's counsel and foreknowledge, he meant the one eternal plan of God. God's counsel is his eternal and unchangeable purpose according to which he determines all things that shall come to pass in heaven, on earth, and in hell and how all that transpires in these three places will serve the glory of his name. Foreknowledge is a characteristic of the counsel and emphasizes that all God's counsel is knowledge beforehand, that is, known by God before what he determines actually comes to pass.

We have no foreknowledge; our knowledge is always *after* a thing or an event. Hence the thing or event we know exists prior to our knowledge of it. Our knowledge of a thing or event is therefore imperfect and limited. But God knows everything before anything exists or takes place. His knowledge of everything is therefore

causative; what he knows comes into existence and actually takes place. His knowledge is perfect, for nothing exists as it is without his foreknowledge.

Peter uses foreknowledge in a more limited sense when he connects it with election. Paul does the same in Romans 8:29, although he uses the word "predestinate," which is almost synonymous with election. The difference between election and predestination is that predestination includes reprobation, whereas election refers to the specific decree of God's counsel according to which God sovereignly *chose* his people in Christ. Predestination includes not only the choice whereby God choose his people for his own, but also the final destination and glory of this people and the entire way to glory, a way that God's people walk in the world. When predestination is used for reprobation, predestination includes the same ideas of end and way to that end. Although both terms refer to God's eternal counsel, foreknowledge logically precedes election. God chose those to be his people whom he foreknew as his people: God elected according to his foreknowledge.

These people who are strangers in the earth and walk a pilgrimage throughout their life were foreknown of God before the worlds were formed. God knew them. He knew them as his people. He knew them as those who were to live in this world as foreigners, strangers, and travelers on a journey, those who do not fit in this world because they are too different from the world. God knew all this beforehand. He chose them not because they were suitable for the purpose he had in mind, but he chose them out of mere sovereign good pleasure, without any regard for works. When God foreknew all he would do in history and into eternity, he foreknew these people as his own. Them he chose.

It is very humbling to ponder that we are God's elect people because he eternally knew us as his own. He loved us with an eternal love. He chose us in Christ. From the viewpoint of our own worth or merit, he could have chosen anyone else. Had he done so, it would have made no difference to him, nor could we complain of any injustice. We deserve everlasting condemnation as well as or even more than the wicked whose end is hell. But God knew

us and chose us to be the people who would represent his cause in the world and through whom he would glorify himself.

Through sanctification of the Spirit (1:2)

To be foreknown and to be elected are not enough; we must also be sanctified.

We are born into the world not as pilgrims, but as those who are completely at home in the world, citizens here below, spiritually identical to anyone in the world, and living a life in the world that is a continual death and ends in hell. Such people are not in any way to be distinguished from the world. Only God's counsel and work make a difference.

God's foreknowledge is causative. God's foreknowledge is the divine cause of the radical change that takes place in us to make us strangers. How God brings that change about is described in the text as "through sanctification of the Spirit."⁶

Sanctification follows from justification, which is God's declaration that the guilty and corrupt sinner is righteous, that is, without guilt. Sanctification, one of the blessings that comes to God's people in their salvation, is the work that cleanses the elect child of God from the defilement and pollution of sin, transforms his nature at its center, makes him holy and without sin, and consecrates him to the service of God. To be holy is to be consecrated to God: the sanctified sinner does everything for God's glory.

This work of sanctification is a profoundly amazing work. It is not analogous to washing a dirty, worthless rock so that it is clean. Rather, it is a work that transforms a useless, dirty rock into a scintillating and beautiful piece of marble to be used in the erection of the temple of God, which is his church. Sanctification is not a restoration of what Adam lost in paradise; it is a cleansing in the blood of Christ that so transforms the elect sinner that he far exceeds in glory any blessedness Adam knew. It is a spiritual change

6. The genitive "of the Spirit" is either a genitive of source or a subjective genitive. The latter is closer to the idea. The Holy Spirit is the subject of the work of sanctification.

that makes a prostitute into the bride of Christ, a blasphemer into a praying saint, a murderer into a lover of God and his neighbor, and a persecutor of the church into a bold preacher of the gospel. It is a cleansing of the mind and will that turns the mind from knowing the lie into the instrument of knowing the truth; it is an alteration of the will that was a stubborn and rebellious faculty of the soul into something obedient and pliable. Sanctification makes one of Satan's helpers, who is completely at home in the world of sin and darkness, into a stranger in this world, a pilgrim who has no abiding city here. To use Paul's words in Galatians 1:3, it is a work of God that rescues an elect child of God from this present evil world and sets him on the path that has glory for its everlasting destination.

Sanctification is begun by God in this life in the work of regeneration, increased throughout the life of the spiritual pilgrim, continued when the believer dies and his soul goes to glory, and finished in the resurrection of the body when our Lord returns at the end of history.

It must be emphasized that God is the author of the change that makes us pilgrims and strangers. We do not enlist in Christ's cause, nor do we volunteer to walk the path of a pilgrim. We are made pilgrims by a work of divine grace "through sanctification of the Spirit."

*Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood
of Jesus Christ (1:2)*

As it often does in Scripture, "unto" means "with a view to, with the purpose that."⁷ We are sanctified by the Spirit with the goal of a life of obedience to God. Sanctification results in a life of obedience by the one sanctified. The idea is even stronger: God through the Spirit sanctifies his elect people with the goal of enabling them to live obediently. God achieves this goal: what he purposes to do, he also does.

7. "Unto" is a translation of *eis*, a preposition that with the articular infinitive expresses purpose.

Before sanctification we were disobedient. We hated God's law, broke his commandments, and fought long and hard against any effort to make our lives conformable to God's will. Sanctification changes such disobedience, makes us desire to keep God's law, and actually enables us to do so. After sanctification we are able to sing, "Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97).

In the remainder of his epistle Peter will define in detail the calling of God's pilgrims in all the relationships of their lives, but essential to every aspect of their calling is obedience. Obedience is the essential characteristic of the elect pilgrim. His transformation from an enemy of God to a pilgrim in this world reveals itself in a life of obedience to God. God's people obey those in authority over them for God's sake. They are subject to their employers as serving Christ. They love their spouses because they love God. When the demands of earth's relationships get in the way of obedience to God, they obey God rather than man. The law of God is their rule throughout life. Without living in obedience, the people of God could not be pilgrims.

This obedience is not due to compulsion or fear of punishment, because sanctification makes us joyfully and willingly obedient. So joyfully obedient do we become that disobedience makes us very sad and brings us to our knees in confession of sin. Our desire above all else is to obey our Father in heaven, for we are thankful for what he has done for us. In obedience we find the joy that makes this life endurable.

The apostle adds "and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." As is frequently the case, the conjunction "and" does not mean sanctification for two purposes: obedience *and* sprinkling with Christ's blood. That interpretation does not even make sense.

"And" in this verse means "by means of."⁸ Sanctification is ac-

8. In a hendiadys the word translated as "and" has a variety of meanings in the Greek. Jesus means by "I am the resurrection and the life" that he is the resurrection because he is the life. We use the same literary device in our speech. I may say to my wife, "I am going to the store, and I will pick up a loaf of bread." I mean that I am going to the store in order to buy a loaf of bread.

completed by means of the blood of Christ. We are washed in his blood. That is, Christ earned for us not only the forgiveness of our sins, but also the actual cleansing of our natures to make them holy. We do not have the right in ourselves to be made holy, nor have we done anything to make ourselves worthy of such a blessing. We are what we are because of what Christ did on the cross.

The Scriptures often speak of sprinkling or washing with the blood of Christ as referring to sanctification. This is the case, for example, in Psalm 51:2, 7: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Some commentators take the position that sprinkling and washing in 1 Peter 1:2 and in Psalm 51 do not refer to sanctification, the cleansing from sin, but to justification, God's declaration of the forgiveness of sins. Thus sprinkling with Christ's blood refers to the cleansing of *guilt* not of *pollution*.

I prefer to interpret the expression as referring to sanctification. This is more in keeping with the grammar, for the phrase "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" modifies the phrase "sanctification of the Spirit." It thus explains how sanctification of the Spirit takes place.

In the old dispensation purification took place by the sprinkling of blood. This was a type of the purification that takes place through the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:19–28). "Christ's blood" is the term Scripture uses to point to the suffering and death of Christ on the cross, by which sacrifice Christ fulfilled the types of the Old Testament and accomplished a full and complete salvation for his people.

Sprinkling with blood is sufficient for such cleansing. Undoubtedly, while Peter looks back to the old dispensation, he also looks ahead to the sacrament of baptism, which is a sign and seal of cleansing with the blood of Christ. Sprinkling with water is enough; immersion is not necessary.⁹ So Peter assures us that we

9. Note that Jesus told Peter at the time of the foot-washing that it was enough that Jesus washed Peter's feet. There was no need for Peter to be washed entirely. Christ's work of washing his disciples' feet pointed to his cross and the cleansing power of his blood (John 13:1–17).

need nothing more for a life of obedience than the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ—not our works, not the works of saints who lived before us, not Mary's intercession, and not our works added to Christ's great work—nothing but the blood of Christ.

Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (1:2)

This apostolic blessing is much like the one the apostle Paul uses in his epistles, as well as the apostle John in his second epistle. The blessing is not merely a greeting or a wish of the apostle for the spiritual well-being of those to whom he writes. The blessing is apostolic; it is an infallible pronouncement of an inspired apostle that actually speaks the blessing of God upon the saints.¹⁰ The apostles speak authoritatively, that is, they say by virtue of their office, "Thus saith the Lord."

It is good and proper that the minister of the gospel pronounces the apostolic blessings on the congregation in which he preaches. His word, too, is authoritative because it is the infallible and authoritative word of God. Hence the minister uses the apostolic blessing found in Scripture and says, "Thus saith the Lord: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you." The congregation must receive this word of the minister by faith and thus appropriate for itself the grace and peace of God.

Grace is both God's attitude of favor toward his people according to which he makes known to them his love and his desire to save, and grace is God's saving power by which God's people are enabled to walk as his people in the world in all the trials and temptations of life.

Peace is serenity and calmness of heart and mind that comes from knowing that we are no longer at war with God, but dwell

10. The form of the Greek verb translated as "be multiplied" is aorist passive optative. The optative mood in the New Testament is almost always an optative of wish. Nevertheless, for the apostle Peter the word does not convey a mere pious wish. It is rather an authoritative expression of God's (and the apostle's) blessing on God's people.

with him in blessed fellowship. In our state of sin, we were at war with God and God was at war with us. The result is trouble, grief, pain, unrest, and ultimate destruction. God makes peace with his people through the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20) and not only blesses his people with every spiritual blessing, but also lives with them in harmony and unity. When our hearts beat in rhythm with the heart of God, all is well and we have genuine peace.

Peace with God results in peace with one another. Husbands live in peace with their wives and wives with their husbands. Parents live in peace with their children and children with their parents. Saints live together in peace and harmony in the church so that the church can, with unity of purpose, strive to fulfill its calling in the world. Insofar as the wicked permit, saints even live in peace with those about them (Jer. 29:7) not harming their neighbors, but loving them according to the precepts of the law.

Peace in the church is much desired. When peace is present, saints dwell together in unity (Ps. 133). The saints are urged, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:7). When the saints appropriate by faith this word of God, peace and prosperity are found within the church.

The apostle means by "be multiplied" that through the blessing of God and the appropriation of that blessing by the congregation grace and peace will increase in power and riches as life goes on. The congregation may suffer many trials, and the persecutions of the ungodly may become more intense, but the blessing, received by faith, will be multiplied and grow richer with the passing of time. Surely there is much room for growth in grace and peace, for the church is still composed of sinful saints who must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

OPENING DOXOLOGY

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,

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

These verses are important for an understanding of what is required of pilgrims of God as they walk their earthly pilgrimage. Peter's manual for pilgrims begins with important ideas crowded into a few short verses in which he tells them that their pilgrimage has its origin in their regeneration; that the chief characteristic of pilgrims are that they live in hope; that the end of their pilgrimage is an incorruptible inheritance; and that they are preserved in all the weary miles they travel by the power of God and the light of their destination shining before their eyes. What a marvelous way to begin! It is enough to inspire us from the outset to faithfulness in our calling.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ (1:3)*

The apostle begins his letter with a doxology of praise to God. This may come as a surprise. The life of a pilgrim is not easy, and faithfulness in the journey has as a necessary consequence a great deal of suffering. One might very well complain about this work of God that makes us strangers in the world. From our viewpoint we prefer to live in the world, where we can have fun and a comfortable and enjoyable home. We might be inclined to argue along these lines. Who wants to exchange the comfort and pleasures of living in peace for the rigors of a difficult and painful journey? No one asked us if we want to exchange this pleasant home in the world for the pain of an arduous trip. To begin with a doxology, a song of praise, seems to be inappropriate because it is so contrary to the apostle's description of the sufferings that pilgrims endure.

Yet Peter expresses his own joy at being a pilgrim. Because this is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we must also take it into our hearts

and onto our lips. We are pilgrims! Blessed be God! If we understand what a privilege and blessing it is to be made pilgrims, we will have no difficulty in making this doxology our own. Each day when we arise from sleep and ponder the few miles that lie ahead in the day's journey, we will not face that journey with foreboding and anxious fear, but with a song in our hearts.

To bless God is to speak well of him. It is to confess his greatness and glory. It is to rejoice in and give thanks for his great work of salvation in Christ.

God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the Father of our savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Father of Christ, for he is the Father of the Son of God become flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35–37). He is the Father of Christ through Christ's resurrection from the dead (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4). Throughout his entire ministry Christ addressed the triune God as his Father. If someone objects and claims that to make the triune God the Father of Christ is to make Christ his own Father, remember that Christ willingly took upon himself weakened human nature; that he made the bearing of the wrath of God an act of his own in obedience to God; and that God not only raised Christ from the dead, but Christ arose by his own divine power (John 10:17–18).

That the triune God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ means that for Christ's sake God is also our God and Father. Christ is the elder brother in the family of God, and we are brothers and sisters in God's house. Because Christ is the eternal and only begotten Son who came into our flesh, we are sons and daughters of God through Christ's work. That is a wonder past finding out. We may be pilgrims and strangers in the earth, but we are so by virtue of our sonship in our Father's house; and that house of our Father is our destination. We have a home in heaven even though in the world we have no home. The journey is short compared to the eternity in which we will dwell with our elder brother and our heavenly Father. Is not this reason to sing a doxology—one we continue to sing as we wend our weary way home?

Which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again (1:3)

“Begotten . . . again” refers to regeneration. By being born again we become sons and daughters of God.

Our first birth from our earthly parents was from a spiritual viewpoint a stillbirth; we were born dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Such a stillbirth can only mean that we were born into this world as part of the world, at home in the world, and doomed to destruction along with the world. It takes a great work to bring us out of the family of fallen Adam and to make us sons and daughters of God. That wonder takes place through a new birth, a second birth, a birth from above.¹¹

Regeneration is the first work of God, entirely apart from the consciousness of the sinner, in which God implants the new life of Christ in the heart of the elect child of God, and which new life is the seed or beginning of the whole new saint who will be finally perfected in glory. It is a necessary second birth, for our first birth was a birth into death. It is a wonder that God performs that is greater than creation itself.¹² The creating power of God makes us pilgrims in the world. Regeneration gives us our heavenly citizenship, makes us foreigners in this world, puts us on the path of our pilgrim's journey, pulls us irresistibly to our heavenly home, and is preserved in us till the end of the journey. All this is true because regeneration gives us the life of Christ himself.

In the continental Reformed tradition, controversy has often split the church over the question whether regeneration is mediate—by means of the preaching of the gospel—or immediate—

11. The Greek word used here is *anagennēsas*, the aorist active participle of *anagennaō*. The preposition *ana* can mean either “again” or “from above.” We are either born again or born from above. John 3, the record of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, uses the word in both senses because both are true: Nicodemus is truly born again, and he is born from above.

12. Canons of Dort, 3–4.12, in *Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:590.

without the means of the preaching of the gospel. Whatever may be the final solution to the question, the fact is that if we are spiritually dead, we first need to be made alive before we can hear the gospel. A physically dead person cannot hear anyone call to him, no matter how loudly the call may come. Only when he is first made alive can he hear the preaching. Thus God must make us alive spiritually before the preaching is effective.

The Reformed confessions speak of regeneration as mediate.¹³ They speak of regeneration in a broader sense as including the sprouting of the seed of regeneration into conscious faith and conversion. Even sanctification is included. Therefore regeneration in the broader sense, including all of salvation, implies and includes the presence of regeneration in the narrower sense.¹⁴

In 1 Peter 1:3, regeneration is spoken of in the wider sense of the whole making alive of the elect saint, for the text speaks of “being begotten again unto a lively hope,” and hope is part of the conscious life of the regenerated child of God.

The great wonder of regeneration is that it is according to God’s abundant mercy.

Mercy is the attribute of God according to which he takes pity on his people in their misery and longs to deliver them. He sees the misery into which they have plunged themselves by their disobedience; he takes note of their trouble and sorrow, their pain and suffering brought on by their sins; and his heart is filled with such pity that he will not rest until they are made happy. It is the pity of a father who sees his little child enduring great pain because of a terrible disease and who wishes that he could be in his child’s place, for the pain of his little child is for him almost unendurable. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Ps. 103:13).

The mercy of God is very particular and only for those who fear him. Mercy can be shown only to God’s people, for mercy is

13. Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 8; Belgic Confession, Art. 24; and Canons of Dordt, 3–4.10–12, in *ibid.*, 3:310, 410–12, and 589–90.

14. See the commentary on 1 Peter 1:23–25 for further discussion of this point.

merited in the cross of Jesus Christ, and Christ's cross is not a universal atoning death for every man. Mercy is particular because God's mercy is not a helpless pity such as we may have for our children. We are unable to make the suffering of our children our own or do anything to ease their anguish. But such is not the case with the sovereign God. His fatherly mercy toward his children is also the pity of his divine will; and God's will is the living will and the living purpose of the living God, which always accomplishes what it purposes to do. In other words, God's mercy is itself the power to deliver his people from their misery and make them happy forever.¹⁵

That mercy of God toward us poor sinners is "abundant." It is abundant, first, in relation to our sins and unworthiness. Our sins are more than we can count. Our unworthiness makes us just denizens of hell. It is a mercy undeserved, unmerited, and given to worthless sinners. Second, mercy is abundant because of what it gives to God's saints. The riches that flow out of mercy are so great and so valuable that we cannot even begin to imagine their worth. They are treasures for this life and the life to come. Third, these mercies are abundant because they are purchased at the cost of the blood of God's own dear Son, a price so enormously high that the thought of it brings us to our knees in humble thanksgiving.

Unto a lively hope (1:3)

We are begotten again "unto" a lively hope. That is, our regeneration results in the Christian pilgrim's being born again and living his life in hope. Hope is the chief characteristic of the pilgrim, and Peter's epistle is really all about hope.

15. Here is the sticking point with those who speak of common grace or common mercy shown to all men. God is merciful to all because he takes pity on all, and he longs to deliver them all. Such a view necessarily drives those who hold this position to universal atonement and renders impotent the great mercy of God, so that it is powerless to save and to accomplish what God earnestly desires.