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Perpetual Forgiveness.

Translated from Dr. E. Preuss's *Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, Part VI.

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(Continued.)

And as regards the theologians, with whom shall we begin? With Clement of Rome?¹⁾ or Augustine? or Luther? Luther says: "Therefore it is the same righteousness which is given unto men in Baptism and at all times in true repentance." (St. Louis Ed., X, 1264.) And in another place: "Since sin eternally inheres in our flesh as long as we live on this earth, and since we never cease to sin and err, we must verily also have an eternal and perpetual forgiveness." (St. Louis Ed., V, 1094. Also XI, 719. 584; XVI, 1194 f.) Martin Chemnitz has the same clear conception of the matter. If a person wishes to be completely cured of the erroneous doctrine of Martensen, he need only read that part of Chemnitz's *Examen* which treats of justification; for by justification he always understands God's perpetual judicial act of regarding the sinner righteous, and nothing else. We really ought to quote the entire article, which covers fifty-three quarto pages. But that being out of the question, we choose half a dozen passages at random, no matter which: "God does not give us the benefit of justification only once in this life, namely, when we are baptized."²⁾ Again: "The papists limit justification to a single moment, when a sinner is at first made righteous. It is obvious that this opinion is in direct conflict with the Holy Scriptures; for when they teach that we become righteous by grace, for Christ's sake, without works, they are not only speaking of the first conversion. The justification which the Scriptures teach is not a

1) Clemens Romanus. *Ep. ad Cor. I, 32*: Δικαιοῦμεθα διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Present tense, and yet he had been baptized long ago.

2) Neque etiam semel tantum in hac vita, quando scilicet baptizamur, Deus nobis offert, communicat et applicat beneficium justificationis. (*Examen*, 184, B.)

Studies in First Peter.

II. The Address.

1. Having in a previous issue (March, 1928) considered the authorship of First Peter, we shall in this article give some attention to the address prefixed to this epistle. It is well known that the Greeks and Romans of antiquity, when they wrote a letter, stated in the beginning the name of the writer and the party or parties addressed. The letter of Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, may here be compared, the opening sentence reading, "Claudius Lysias greets the Most Excellent Procurator Felix." Acts 23, 26. It is the method which is followed in most of the New Testament epistles. In keeping with it, Peter mentions himself as the author, employing, as the commentaries point out, not his original name, Simon, but rather

16) Fresenius, *Rechtfertigung*, p. 569—573; comp. also p. 545.

17) *Die Theologie der Konkordienformel*, II, p. 192.

the name which Jesus had given to him. He mentions his title, "an apostle of Jesus Christ," not from motives of pride, we can be certain, but wishing to assure his letter the favorable reception to which it, being an apostolic and hence an inspired, message, was entitled.

2. Next the addressees are named. Literally translated, the opening sentence reads: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect strangers of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the determination of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, — may grace and peace be multiplied to you!" A number of geographical names occur, which it will be best to glance at briefly before looking at the other items. All these names designate provinces or territories in Asia Minor, Pontus bordering on the Black Sea, Galatia lying southwest of Pontus, Cappadocia lying to the east of Galatia, Asia lying to the west and touching the Aegean Sea, and Bithynia lying northeast of Asia and adjoining Pontus. It may be that the messenger carrying the letter was instructed to visit the provinces in the order named. Most of what is now called Asia Minor was included in this address. There is some dispute about the meaning of Galatia, namely, as to whether Galatia proper or the Roman province by that name, which was far more comprehensive, is meant. Since the cities in which Paul had worked so long and so strenuously, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch, lay in the Roman province Galatia, but not in the small country bearing that name, it seems best to take the term in the Roman significance. Peter plainly is here addressing *some* churches founded by Paul. It seems quite natural, then, to assume that he is addressing the Pauline churches of Asia Minor in general. This must not be looked upon as a violation of the agreement Peter and Paul had made according to Gal. 2, for a number of years had elapsed since then, and different conditions and new difficulties may well have necessitated the abrogation of the agreement. In my opinion, Paul at this time was in the far distant West, in Spain, carrying the Gospel from place to place, and in his absence Peter addressed this encouraging letter to the Christians of Asia Minor. We have here an encyclical, or circular letter, addressed to a number of churches.

3. The addressees are called the elect strangers of the dispersion in Pontus, etc. At once the question arises whether St. Peter is addressing Jewish or Gentile Christians or people of

both classes. Dispersion (*diaspora*) is a term employed to designate the Jews outside of Palestine, living scattered in many countries. Cf. John 7, 35. But the contents of the whole epistle forbid us to assume that it was written principally for people of Jewish extraction and upbringing. Let the reader compare the following passages pointed to by Zahn: 1, 14. 18. 21; 2, 10; 3, 6; especially 4, 3 ff. The term *diaspora* may well be taken in its etymological meaning (scattering), signifying that the Christians are not living together in one happy group, or community, but are scattered here and there, resembling in this respect those Jews who had to live outside of the Holy Land. Yes, we of the *una sancta ecclesia* form one body, but it is an invisible one; the outward manifestation of the great truth that all its members constitute one flock under one Shepherd is still lacking and will be lacking till the day when the last one of God's children has been added to the flock. If the question is asked, Why did Peter choose this term, which had come to have such a technical significance wherever there were Jews, a term used chiefly in reference to Israel? we may reply that he wishes to remind his Christian readers of their status as the spiritual Israel, as the true sons and daughters of Abraham, living, however, not yet in the homeland, the heavenly Canaan.

This agrees well with the term "strangers" applied to the addressees. The New Testament writings repeatedly dwell on the thought that the Christian is a stranger, a sojourner here on earth (1 Pet. 2, 11), that here he has no abiding city, seeking one to come (Heb. 13, 14). By calling his readers strangers, Peter, the exponent of the heavenly hope of the Christians, indirectly points to one of the great themes he is to expound — that our inheritance is awaiting us in heaven. The genitive *διασπορᾶς* may well, as Stoeckhardt suggests, be regarded as a genitive of description (*genitivus qualitatis*). We might then render: "To the elect strangers scattered abroad in Pontus," etc.

4. The word "elect" requires special consideration. What does it mean? The literal translation of the Greek is simply chosen (out of a multitude or a number). That St. Peter thereby referred to an act of God required no proof for the early Christians. But when did this act take place, in eternity or in time? It is conceivable that the author is here speaking of something God did for his readers during their life here on earth, namely, that he has conversion in mind; for when God converts a person, He separates him from the mass of the unconverted, and that act might be called a choosing. But there is no good reason why we should not

accept the word as referring to the election of grace which took place in eternity, in keeping with the meaning of ἐξελέξατο in Eph. 1, 4. It is a grand thought — these Christians are scattered, they are strangers, far from home, but they are the chosen ones of God, having from all eternity been predestined to be God's people and heirs of eternal life. Outwardly poor and insignificant, they have riches that far surpass the wealth and splendor of Pergamus and Ephesus; for in eternity God thought of them and determined to make them His own, citizens in the kingdom of God and inhabitants of the Jerusalem above. If the question is asked how Peter could address all the Christians in the congregations of Asia Minor as elect, since without a doubt some of them believed for a season only, the answer is that in this beautiful Gospel proclamation he is entirely disregarding those who would apostatize and is focusing all attention on what God has done and is doing for His children. That there are people who believe for a time, but not to the end, is true enough, but a discussion of their pitiful case does not belong in the province of the Gospel, but in that of the Law, with its notes of solemn warning.

5. How did the addressees get to be elect strangers, dispersed here on earth, but having names which were written in the Book of Life? That question is answered in the opening phrases of v. 2: "according to the forethought of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit." In my view the expressions κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θ. π. and ἐν ἀγιασμῷ π. are modifiers not merely of ἐκλεκτοῖς, but of ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις. The thought is: You Christians have become elect strangers on earth, that is, citizens of heaven, according to the forethought of God and through the sanctification of the Spirit. In this way Gunkel connects the words, his translation reading: "*An die auserlesenen Fremdlinge, die in der Zerstreung in Pontus usw. weilen, die es geworden sind nach dem ewigen Ratschluss Gottes des Vaters und durch die Weihe des Geistes.*" (*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, neu uebersetzt und fuer die Gegenwart erkluert*, III, 252.) Wohlenberg, in Zahn's commentary, adopts the same construction. Not to mention other considerations, the position of ἐκλεκτοῖς would have to be a different one if the prepositional phrases were to refer to it exclusively.

6. As is well known, πρόγνωσις is a disputed term, some rendering it foreknowledge, others forethought, in the sense of prearrangement, predetermination, predestination. It cannot be my object here to give an exhaustive discussion of this term; I shall

content myself with three brief remarks. In the first place, to take the word here in the sense of foreknowledge, would make the whole phrase rather meaningless. Elect strangers according to the foreknowledge of God, — how unimportant would such a statement have been! Most assuredly they were elect strangers according to the foreknowledge of God, because God knows everything from eternity. Nobody who believes in the existence of an omniscient God will dispute that. But it is hard to see that there would have been any special point in this connection to an allusion to the omniscience of God. In the second place, the noun *πρόγνωσις* occurs in one more passage of the New Testament, and we can ascertain from the connection which of the two possible meanings the speaker had in mind when using the word. The passage is Acts 2, 23, where it is again St. Peter who is employing the word, namely, in his great Pentecostal address. Speaking of Jesus, he describes Him as *τῇ ὀρισμένῃ βουλῇ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἔκδοτον*, which the Authorized Version translates: "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." That Christ was delivered over to the enemies "by the foreknowledge of God" is a strange, illogical statement. Foreknowledge *knows*, but it does not perform an act like the delivering of Jesus to His enemies. Evidently the rendering "foreknowledge" is an unfortunate case of extreme literalness. But if we translate that Christ was delivered over by the determinate counsel and forethought of God, by His decision reached in eternity, then we have a thought which is intelligible and satisfying. Determinate counsel and forethought are synonymous expressions, both describing one and the same act, one stressing the element of will, the other that of knowledge. It is true that Wendt in Meyer's Commentary (on Acts) strongly contends for the translation "foreknowledge." He renders: "By virtue of (*vermoege*) the determinate counsel and foreknowledge (*Vorhererkenntnis*) of God." But let me say it once more, Is it an intelligible thought if we say that Jesus was delivered over by virtue of the foreknowledge of God? Do not all who defend such a translation unwittingly put a different meaning into the English word foreknowledge, employing it as if it meant determination, prearrangement, or something to that effect? We may hold, then, that the only correct rendering for *πρόγνωσις* in Acts 2, 23 is forethought, predetermination. But if such is the meaning of the word in Acts 2, 23, we are compelled to use it in that sense in the passage under consideration, unless cogent reasons should forbid it, and reasons of that kind are lacking.

My third consideration is that the majority of Biblical scholars take the word in the significance which I am defending. The dictionary of Wilke-Grimm-Thayer translates the word forethought, "prearrangement," although Thayer adds a parenthetical remark, pointing out that there are scholars who are not concurring. The new dictionary of Preuschen-Bauer renders the phrase in our passage "*nach Gottes des Vaters Vorbestimmung.*" Gunkel's rendering "*der ewige Ratschluss Gottes*" was quoted before. Moffatt (in *The New Testament, a New Translation*) renders: "To the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, etc., whom God the Father has predestined and chosen." Goodspeed's translation is very similar: "whom God the Father has chosen and predestined." The opinions of exegetes are not decisive for us, of course. But when scholars who personally reject the doctrine of grace as set forth in the Bible nevertheless, in translating our passage, employ the rendering "forethought," "predestination," "prearrangement," we must say that the position which this article sponsors is enormously strengthened. Let us regard it as established, then, that St. Peter tells the Christians of Asia Minor they are elect strangers according to the predestination of God.

7. The meaning of the whole phrase now is clear. In eternity God resolved that the people to whom Peter was writing should be elect strangers, true Israelites, having their home above. Their blessed state as believers was not an incidental thing, something that simply happened, but something that had been decided upon by God infinitely long ago. It was a gracious, loving resolution, bestowing upon them the greatest blessings. When they were born into this world, the predetermined plan of God concerning them was carried out. They became elect strangers. The words of Peter had to bring home to his readers the great truth that they owed their Christianity entirely to God, who had chosen them for Himself before the foundations of the world were laid. Evidently the forethought of God was the *cause* of their being citizens in the kingdom of Christ. It will be observed that the apostle is here not expounding the whole doctrine of election, or predestination. He is not dwelling, for instance, on what induced God to fore-ordain His children to their high position, namely, His unbounded love and the redemption of Christ. But the point which stands out clearly is that the spiritual blessings which the Christians enjoy have come upon them as the result of a decree of God. What riches of comfort are offered in that declaration! If their faith rests on a decree of God, then they are sure and safe, and nobody

will be able to snatch away their crown. It is evident, furthermore, that, if all our spiritual blessings flow from a decree of God, then they are given by grace and have not been earned, or merited.

8. The significance of the next phrase, *ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος*, by the sanctification of the Spirit, has likewise been debated. Some exegetes have doubted that *ἁγιασμός* may here be taken in the active sense, denoting the act of sanctifying, since the prevailing meaning is holiness, a state being indicated (*"der Zustand des Geheiligtseins,"* Preuschen-Bauer). But the word may well be taken as describing an act, as Blass's *Grammar* points out, § 109, and Preuschen-Bauer's *Dictionary* corroborates. Certainly the active meaning fits the context far better than any other one. St. Peter is here in brief, forcible words relating what God has done for His children. After stating that the Father has elected them before the foundations of the world were laid, he alludes to the Holy Spirit's activity in their behalf. His work consisted in this, that He sanctified them. *Πνεύματος*, it will be noted, is the subjective genitive. If we inquire a little further into the meaning of the term, we can say that *ἁγιασμός* is the act whereby somebody is made an *ἅγιος*, a holy person, dedicated to God. The term denotes simply the process of regeneration, the creation of a new life, with this connotation, that the new life is pure, holy, God-pleasing. St. Peter reminds the Christians how God carried out His loving decree enacted concerning them in eternity to make them His own; He did it through the work of the Holy Spirit, who entered them with His power and made them believers and thereby members of the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

9. Finally, the apostle adds the purpose of their having been made elect strangers, *εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ θαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. *Ἐπακοή*, obedience, is often explained as designating faith, a meaning which the word certainly often carries. But if *ἁγιασμός* refers to the creation of faith, then it would be tautological if this term, too, denoted faith. For that reason the interpretation is to be preferred which explains obedience as a term denoting the Christian life. What St. Peter says is that his readers have been placed in their exalted position in order to show obedience, obedience to the commandments of God, whereby the Father in heaven and the Savior are honored.

10. Another purpose which God had in mind when He made the readers of this epistle elect strangers was that they might be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ (blood here is the objec-

tive genitive). Christ is here, as so often in the Scriptures, thought of as a sacrificial Lamb, whose blood has cleansing power. Every Christian is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ when he through faith enters into fellowship with the Savior. Then there is applied to him that saving flood which washes away all his guilt in the sight of God. But that is not to be a one-time act, never to be repeated. It is rather to continue throughout life, the Christian every day going to the fountain filled with blood and there cleansing himself from the sins and imperfections which do not cease to harass him. We may here compare the line of thought found in 1 John 1, 6, 7, where the apostle dwells on the importance of our walking in light, in purity, just as God is Light, and adds: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin"; that is to say, sins, missteps, will occur again and again while we are pursuing our journey on the narrow way leading to heaven; but we have this consolation, that the blood of Jesus Christ is there at all times, washing away our sins, if we but be willing by faith to apply it. This, then, is the message of St. Peter as contained in the last two phrases: "You Christians have been called to obedience, to a life of holy service. It is true, sin remains in you, and for that reason you have furthermore been called to be sprinkled ever and again by the blood of Christ, which will wash away the guilty stains whenever they appear."

11. Commentators have not failed to note that Peter in this address, so brief and yet so replete with deep, important thought, is making mention of the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, who has chosen us from eternity, God the Son, who has redeemed us through the shedding of His blood, and God the Holy Spirit, who has placed us in the new life of faith and love. We have here strong proof that the early Christians distinguished the three divine persons, while, on the other hand, there is abundant proof that they did not believe in three gods, but in one. It is a blessed mystery, and happy are all who, without seeking to establish the doctrine of the Trinity philosophically, will simply follow in the footsteps of the sacred penmen of the New Testament and adore the one great God, giving praise to each one of the three divine persons who jointly effected our salvation.

12. The holy apostle adds to the address a fervent wish, equal to a prayer: "May grace and peace be multiplied to you!" Grace is the favor, the good will, of God. The apostle's readers were in possession of it, and he wishes them an increasing measure of that priceless possession. Peace is that quality in man which results

from a knowledge of, and trust in, the grace of God. Having the conviction that God regards him with favor, the Christian is at peace, is calm and content, realizing that his highest need has been met and his innermost longing satisfied. Peter wishes his readers the ever-increasing assurance that God has forgiven their sins for the sake of Christ, an assurance producing hope, confidence, and heavenly joy. Altogether this is an opening salutation which very well befits the grand epistle it introduces, one of the most comforting books of the New Testament.
