

“Blessed BE THE God”

1 Peter 1:3a

March 5, 2023

INTRO: When was the last time you realized you took something or someone you love/loved for granted?

PRAYER

CONTEXT:

- ~ Ongoing series... 1st Peter: “No Matter What!”
- ~ Peter... everyone’s encouragement
- ~ Blazing speed through vv.1-2...
- ~ Today... begin unpacking v.3’s 1st 3 Greek words

PREVIEW:

1. WHAT... does this text mean?
2. WHO... gets the blessing?
3. HOW... does it work?

BIG IDEA: *Our BE-ing blesses God!*

TEXT:

1 Peter 1:1-3a

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. **3** Blessed be the God...

Blessed BE THE God...

T/S: Today we will focus on what this means & how we are involved... Next time we'll go deeper into the HOW? & WHY?

I. WHAT “Blessed be” Means

“Blessed be...”

~ 1 Peter 1:3 vs. Matthew 5's Beatitudes

>> *Think holy eulogy vs. holy harmony.*

>> Think ACTION with ATTITUDE!

~ Psalm 103-105's repetitious "*Bless the LORD...*"
>> These texts, in context is pretty clear...
>> *Blessing the LORD is living & loving loud!* - JDP

~ Isaiah 43:7 *...created & called for My glory...*

~ Psalm 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God!*

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever
you do, do all to the glory of God.

T/S: *We're starting to see the blessing formula form...*

II. WHO is "Blessed"

- ~ **God** (cf. blessing formulas in Eph. & 2 Cor. too)
- ~ **Believers** (Romans 8:28-30)
- ~ **God** (see below... pillar 3)

T/S: Let's connect the biblical, theological, & missional dots

III. HOW Believers Bless God

~ *Biblically...*

>> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

~ *Theologically*

>> Jesus directly

>>> Great Commandments

>>> Great Commission

>>> Gospel of John

>>>> **1:1-18**

>>>> **3:3,16,36**

>>>> **8:32&36**

>>>> **14:15**

>>>> **ch.15** *abide to obey & obey to abide*

>>>> **17:4**

I glorified You (Father) on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do.

>>>> **20:21**

As the Father has sent Me, so now I sent you!

T/S: You better get ready for the war! (cf. Eph. 6:10-20)

~ *Missionally* (BRIDGE family)

>> **Relational LOVE**

>>> Great Commandments

>>> *Blessed love flows Down, Up, In, Out*

>> **Faithful OBEDIENCE**

>>> John 14:15

>>> *God's Word, will, ways*

>> **Total TRANSFORMATION**

>>> 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

>>> *Head, Heart, Hands (D3)*

>> **Fruitful GROWTH**

>>> John 15:8 *Bearing much fruit glorifies*

>>> *Life Cycle... L, L, L, L, L*

T/S: We bless God by glorifying God...
and we glorify God by finding & growing
more glorifiers!

- JDP

>> **Missional MANIFESTO**



One FAITH. One FAMILY. One FOCUS.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will BE My witnesses (locally, regionally, and globally).” – Acts 1:8

One Question: **WHAT DO YOU WANT?**

One Offer: **COME AND SEE.**

One Promise: **TRUTH IN LOVE!**

Our Truth-in-Love Distinctives: We are...

1. Responding to grace & repenting of sin...
2. Trusting the Bible & obeying God's Word...
3. Growing in-Christ & living Spirit-led...
4. Praying for guidance & following by faith...
5. Dying to self & carrying our cross...
6. BE-ing the Church & loving one another...(*truly loving* one another)
7. Equipping the saints & exemplifying supernatural unity...
8. Ministering as ambassadors & discerning matters shrewdly...
9. Worshipping God vertically & experiencing Him horizontally...
10. Proclaiming the Gospel (*no matter what*) & fishing for men...
11. Making disciples-warriors & winning spiritual-warfare...
12. Loving our King & serving His kingdom!

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *Doxology & 10,000 Reasons*

STUDY Notes:

New American Commentary – Dr. Thomas Schreiner

1:3 Peter begins with the theme of the entire paragraph.

God is to be blessed (eulogētos—the NIV translates the word “blessed” here as “praise”) and praised for the salvation he has given to believers.

Many New Testament letters begin with a thanksgiving, but a blessing formula is also found in 2 Cor 1:3 and Eph 1:3.

Blessing God, not surprisingly, is rooted in the Old Testament and is a pervasive feature of Old Testament piety.

The blessing is NOT a prosaic introduction...

but begins the section with **JOY**, a gladness that fills the rest of the passage.

The blessing is directed to God, “even” (kai; NIV “and) the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Father is the fount from which all goodness flows, and even the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son, yields to the Father. We know from the Gospel of John that the Father commands and the Son obeys (John 5:19), the Father sends and the Son goes. And yet such a difference in role does not diminish the dignity of the Son, nor is there any notion that the Son is a creature (cf. John 1:1, 18; 20:28).

The reason God is to be praised is now explained
—“*he has given us new birth.*”

The term *anagennēsas* actually emphasizes “rebegetting or begetting anew rather than being born anew,” though the latter idea is also implied. This is borne out in [1 Pet 1:23](#), where believers are said to be begotten (*anagegennēmenoi*) by the imperishable seed of God’s word.

Begetting by “seed” directs our attention to the Father’s role in producing children, with the means used being the word of God (1 Pet 1:23).

The focus therefore is on God’s initiative in producing new life.

No one takes any credit for being born. It is something that happens to us. The result of God’s begetting is also included; believers are born anew (cf. John 3:3, 7) and enjoy new life. The begetting again of believers is “in his great mercy.” The preposition “in” (*kata*) probably denotes the cause or reason for our new life. Believers deserve judgment and wrath, but God is a God of mercy and grace, bestowing life upon those who are opposed to him (cf. Eph 2:4–5).

The goal or result of God's begetting is now explained with the first of three clauses beginning with the preposition *eis*.

In v. 3 Peter mentions the living hope of believers, in v. 4 their inheritance, and in v. 5 their salvation. He seems to have a fondness for triads, for we have already noticed the threefold work of the Father, Spirit, and Son in v. 2.

A "living hope" is one that is genuine and vital, in contrast to a hope that is empty and vain.

The focus, of course, is on the word "hope."

Those who are suffering persecution in Asia Minor are not dashed to the ground by their troubles. **They look to the future with the sure confidence that inestimable blessing awaits them.** Nor is their confidence baseless superstition. It is **grounded in and secured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

Their hope, in other words, is the hope of resurrection, triumph over death; hence, whatever happens to them in this world is trivial compared to the blessing of the future resurrection.

Some scholars link the resurrection to being begotten by the Father instead of to the living hope. This view is less likely for two reasons. First, the word order suggests that Christ's resurrection should be linked to the living hope since the former immediately follows the latter. Second, Peter emphasized that Jesus Christ was raised "from the dead." If Peter had wanted to emphasize our new life, he probably would not have added the words "from the dead." Their addition suggests he latched onto the hope believers have even after they die.¹³ Third, the word "living" connects the hope to the resurrection.¹

The New Testament Commentary – Dr. Wayne Grudem

1. Joy in future heavenly reward (1:3–5)

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, [1, 2 Peter, Jude](#), vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 60–62.

3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* echoes a frequent Old Testament word of praise to God (Gen. 14:20; 24:27; Ruth 4:14; 1 Sam. 25:32; 1 Kgs 1:48; Ps. 28:6; 31:21; 41:13) and changes it so as to praise God with a name he never revealed in the Old Testament, 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

The term '*Father*', as applied to the first person of the Trinity, signifies not that the Father in any way created the Son or caused him to exist (for the Son has always existed and was never created, John 1:1–3; 8:58; 17:5, 24; Rev. 22:13), but that he relates to the Son as a father relates to a son normally: the Father plans and directs, the Son responds and obeys; the Father 'sends', the Son comes from the Father (Gal. 4:4; John 3:16, 18; 5:19, 22, 26–27, 30). The Father creates 'through' the Son; all things come 'from' the Father 'through' the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

Peter encourages his readers to praise God, a helpful remedy for hearts weighed down with discouragement because of suffering.

He then lists the reason for praise:

By his great mercy we have been born anew.

The word for 'born anew' (*anagennaō*) has a more active sense than our translation (RSV) indicates, for the root word (*gennaō*) often refers to a father's role in the birth of a child (AV, 'hath begotten us again'), either literally (Matt. 1:2–20) or figuratively, of spiritual birth (1 Cor. 4:15).

'Begot' is archaic, however, and he 'has caused us to be born again' (NASB) is probably best. In blessing God, Peter thinks first of the new spiritual life that God has given to his people.¹

This **being born anew is *by his great mercy***, a phrase with the same preposition (*kata*) as 'according to the foreknowledge' (v. 2). No foreknowledge of the fact that we would believe, no foreseeing of any desirableness or merit on our part, is mentioned here or anywhere else in Scripture when indicating God's ultimate reason for our salvation.

It is simply ‘*according to his great mercy*’ that he gave us new life.

We have been born again, Peter says, *to a living hope*, or perhaps *into* (*eis*, into the sphere or realm of) ‘a living hope’.

This hope is the eager, confident expectation of the life to come...

which Peter describes in more detail in the next verse.

It is ‘*living*’—by so describing it Peter indicates that it grows and increases in strength year by year.

If such a growing hope is the expected result of being born again, then perhaps the degree to which believers have an intense, confident expectation of the life to come is one useful measure of progress toward spiritual maturity.

It is not surprising that such a hope is particularly evident in many older Christians as they approach death.

God brought about this new birth *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

Grammatically this phrase could modify the participle 'living', indicating that hope is living 'through (the power of) the resurrection' (so Kelly, p. 48), but it is unlikely that this is the correct sense: (1) such a meaning would have been more clearly expressed if Peter had used a relative clause, 'to a hope which is living through the resurrection' (*eis elpida hē zōsan di'anastaseōs*), or even 'on account of the resurrection' (*di'anastasin*); (2) a closely parallel example of God acting *through (dia)* some other person or thing to give us new birth is found in verse 23: 'You have been born anew ... through (*dia*) the living and abiding word of God'; and (3) there is in Peter a common pattern of persons, especially God, doing something through or by means of (*dia*) someone or something else (1 Pet. 1:5, 12, 23; 2:5, 14(?); 3:1, 21; 4:11; 5:12; 2 Pet. 1:4).

The resurrection of Christ from the dead secures for his people both new resurrection bodies and new spiritual life.

Christians do not in this age receive new bodies but God does grant, on the basis of Jesus' resurrection, renewed spirits. Thus, spiritually, believers have been 'raised with Christ' (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6; cf. Rom. 6:4, 11).²

MacArthur Study Bible:

² Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 59–61.

1:3 **Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Though God was known as Creator and Redeemer in the OT, He was rarely called Father. Christ, however, always addressed God as His Father in the Gospels (as John 5:17), except in the separation on the Cross (Matt. 27:46). In so doing, Christ was claiming to be of the same nature, being, or essence as the Father (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 10:29–39; 14:6–11; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3, 17; 2 John 3).

Also, by speaking of “**our**” Lord, Peter personalized the Christian’s intimate relationship with the God of the universe through His Son (cf. 1 Cor. 6:17), an important truth for suffering Christians to remember.

abundant mercy.

The reason God provided a glorious salvation for mankind is that He is merciful.

Sinners need God’s mercy because they are in a pitiful, desperate, wretched condition as sinners

(cf. Eph. 2:4; Titus 3:5; see also Ex. 34:6; Ps. 108:4; Is. 27:4; Lam. 3:22; Mic. 7:18).

has begotten us again.

God gave the New Birth as part of His provision in salvation. When a sinner comes to Christ and puts his faith in Him, he is born anew into God's family and receives a new nature (*see notes on v. 23; John 1:13; 3:1–21*).

a living hope.

The living hope is eternal life.

Hope means confident optimism, and:

- (1) comes from God (Ps. 43:5);
- (2) is a gift of grace (2 Thess. 2:16);
- (3) is defined by Scripture (Rom. 15:4);
- (4) is a reasonable reality (3:15);
- (5) is secured by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jn 11:25-26; 14:19; 1 Cor. 15:17);
- (6) is confirmed in the believer by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13);
- (7) defends the Christian against Satan's attacks (1 Thess. 5:8);
- (8) is confirmed through trials (Rom. 5:3, 4);
- (9) produces joy (Ps. 146:5); and
- (10) is fulfilled in Christ's return (Titus 2:13).

What Does it Mean to Bless God?

We know that we need God's blessing... but can we bless God? Here's what the Bible means when it talks about "blessing the lord" and how can we start blessing God today.

• [Lisa Loraine Baker](#) Contributing Writer

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People on mission trips hope and pray to bless the people they serve. What often happens is the mission team themselves receive the greatest blessings. How does that happen? Mission trip teams go with abundant resources—including prayer warriors back home, supplies for those they seek to serve (including Bibles), and their presence. The combination of blessings from both the team and those on the mission field causes them to bless God. We think of giving to others as [blessings](#). But what does it mean to [bless God](#)?

Where Does the Bible Talk about Blessing God?

The passage most visited when we think of people blessing God is [Psalm 103](#), where King David begins, *"Bless the LORD, O my soul"* ([103:1](#)).

[David's psalms contain the most instances of telling people to or of himself blessing God \(seven times we see "Bless the LORD" as an exact match\).](#)

Yet David used many terms of praise for God throughout his writings.

In [Psalm 68:26](#), David said, "Bless God." In [Psalm 145:21](#), David said, "My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever."

Moses tells the people they will bless the Lord when they eat and are full when they come into the land the Lord would give them ([Deuteronomy 8:10](#)).

The song of Deborah and Barak in [Judges 5](#) twice directs people to bless the Lord.

[Psalms 104:1,35](#); [Psalm 134:1,2](#); and [Psalm 135:19-20](#) all have the phrase "Bless the Lord" (the author is unidentified in each).

[Psalm 135](#) includes the author praising God for His greatness.

In [Nehemiah 9:5](#), we read about a group of leaders who spoke to the people of Israel, "Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, 'Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.'"

The Old Testament contains the most times that the phrase, "Bless the LORD (God)" is used, but we also see it in the book of James, often called the "Proverbs of the New Testament."

James 3:9 admonishes readers on how they use their tongues. People bless God and then turn around and curse others "who are made in the likeness of God."

How Can Humans Bless God?

We can list God's attributes—

1. his **holiness**, his creating the heavens and the earth—and ponder that we receive myriad blessings from *Him*.
2. He is the giver of life, and life in Christ is our ultimate blessing.
3. He blesses us with
 - a. salvation,
 - b. His Holy Spirit,
 - c. His kingdom,
 - d. brothers- and sisters-in-Christ all over the world, and
 - e. the record of blessings goes on

So we may wonder,

**"How can I, a mere sinful being,
bless our mighty God?"**

But many people throughout Scripture, as we saw above, indicate not only the possibility of blessing Him, but they indeed *do* bless Him. How?

King David, we can say, was a master of blessing God, and his psalms show us how.

When we look at the context of the passages, it's plain to see that

*to bless God means to
praise Him.*

To bless God, as used in David's psalms, is the Hebrew verb ***barack***.

It's an act of adoration and
praise, for it also implies
kneeling.

David begins [Psalm 145](#) by saying, "I will extol You, my God and King, and bless Your name forever and ever." **Extol** is also a word meaning praise and adore.

Through blessing God, we lift Him up for proper worship as "high and lifted up" ([Isaiah 6:1](#)).

Yes, through all this, we see humans can bless God. In fact, He welcomes our blessings.

The following list of actions we can take to bless God

is predicated on God being sovereign, [holy](#), and good. His [attributes](#) include self-sufficiency, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, incomprehensibility, self-sufficiency, and immutability.

It's a very good thing we will have all of the rest of eternity to bless Him once we reach glory because of who He is and how awesome and amazing He is.

When we pray, the Bible tells us the Spirit intercedes for us when we groan in our weakness, not knowing how to pray as we ought ([Romans 8:26](#)). As David did many times, **beginning our prayers**

by exalting, praising, and blessing God leads us to pray as we should. We pour our hearts out to Him, knowing He hears us. This blesses Him because we are leaning in to Him for all our needs (including the need to bless Him as we ought).

What Actions Bless God?

Looking at the various Bible passages that mention blessing God, we see many things that create a means to bless him.

We bless God when we do the following:

- 1. We display reverent fear and awe of Him** ([Deuteronomy 6:1-2](#); [Hebrews 10:31](#)).
- 2. We thank Him for who He is and for what He has, is, and has promised He will do** ([Deuteronomy 15:4](#); [1 Chronicles 17:27](#); [Isaiah 1:18](#), [Psalm 100:4](#); [103:2](#)).
- 3. We acknowledge Him for who He is** ([Psalm 104:1](#)).
- 4. We praise Him for how He loves us** ([1 John 4:19](#)).
- 5. We exalt Him above all else** ([Psalm 99:9](#)).
- 6. We live lives that reflect who we are as His** ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#)).

7. **We glorify Him to others** ([Psalm 129:8](#)).
8. **We gather with other believers to worship Him** ([Psalm 26:12](#); [68:26](#); [Hebrews 10:45](#)).
9. **We spend quiet time in His Word** ([Luke 24:45](#); [Romans 15:4](#)).
10. **We pray in His name** ([Luke 11:1-4](#); [John 14:6](#)).
11. **We are obedient** ([Isaiah 1:16-17](#); [Psalm 103:20](#); [Luke 6:28](#); [Romans 12:14](#); [1 Peter 3:9](#)).
12. **We love Him** ([Jesus](#)) **with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength** ([Matthew 22:37](#)).
13. **We love others as ourselves** ([Luke 10:27](#)).
14. **We praise Him for His counsel** ([Psalm 16:7](#)).
15. **We share the Gospel** ([Romans 1:16](#)).
16. **We bow in reverent fear and awe of Him** ([Psalm 115:13](#)).
17. **We remember His works** ([Psalm 134:3](#); [145:10](#)).

It's impossible to list all the ways we can bless the Lord in this short space. A good study would be to look through Scripture for a revelation of the myriad ways we can bless God. He's certainly given us a treasure of passages about blessing Him in the Bible.

A Prayer to Bless God Today

Father God, it is a privilege to bless Your holy name. Who am I to speak to the Creator of the heavens and the earth? But You hear me, Lord, and I am in awe of You. I, like King David, praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I do not have enough human words to express the praise You deserve. But I know and trust Your promise of what's to come. You alone are worthy, and You alone know my deepest emotions and needs. I surrender all to You, my Lord, and I wait expectantly for You to manifest Your glory through me as I exalt You.

One day, at the name of Jesus, every knee in heaven, on earth, and even under the earth will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to Your glory, O, most gracious heavenly Father. To you be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Word Pictures In The New Testament:

Blessed be (εὐλογητος [*eulogētos*]). No copula in the Greek (ἔστω [*estō*], let be, or ἔστιν [*estin*], is, or εἴη [*eiē*], may be). The verbal adjective (from εὐλογεω [*eulogeō*]) occurs in the N. T. only of God, as in the LXX (Luke 1:68). **See also 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3.**

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (ὁ θεος και πατηρ του κυριου ἡμων Ἰησου Χριστου [*ho theos kai patēr tou kuriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou*]).

This precise language in 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; and part of it in 2 Cor. 11:31; Rom. 15:6.

See **John 20:17** for similar language by Jesus.

Great (πολυ [polu]). Much.

Begat us again (ἀναγεννησας ἡμας [anagennēsas hēmās]). First aorist active articular (ὁ [ho], who) participle of ἀναγενναω [anagennaō], late, and rare word to beget again, in Aleph for *Sirach* (*Prol.* 20), in Philo, in Hermetic writings, in N. T. only here and verse 23. “It was probably borrowed by the New Paganism from Christianity” (Bigg). The Stoics used ἀναγεννησις [anagennēsis] for παλιγγενεσία [palingenesia] (Titus 3:5). If ἀνωθεν [anōthen] in John 3:3 be taken to mean “again,” the same idea of regeneration is there, and if “from above” it is the new birth, anyhow.

Unto a living hope (εἰς ἐλπίδα ζωσαν [eis elpida zōsan]). Peter is fond of the word “living” (present active participle of ζω [zō]) as in 1:23; 2:4, 5, 24; 4:5, 6. The Pharisees cherished the hope of the resurrection (Acts 23:6), but the resurrection of Jesus gave it proof and permanence (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). It is no longer a dead hope like dead faith (James 2:17, 26). This revival of hope was wrought “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (δια ἀναστασεως [dia anastaseōs]). Hope rose up with Christ from the dead, though the disciples (Peter included) were slow at first to believe it.

The Apologetics Study Bible:

Karl Marx complained that religion was the opiate of the people.

Did Peter support the comfortable life of oppressors by pacifying those who are suffering with the idea of a heavenly inheritance in the next world?

In answering this question, **we need to recall that Peter himself suffered as a Christian, and the tradition that he died for the faith is likely accurate.**

What we find in 1 Pt, therefore, are not the words of someone with power telling those who are suffering to endure injustice because heaven awaits. We **hear the words of someone who suffered along with those he taught.**

The early Christians did not have political power but rather were at the mercy of governing authorities if the latter turned against them.

What Peter wrote provides no justification for injustice. **We distort Peter's words if we say to those suffering under our authority, "Don't worry about suffering.** You will be rewarded in heaven." On the other hand, Marx's objection assumes that the heavenly hope is not real.

Millions of Christians throughout history have suffered and have had no prospect of worldly happiness. Peter's words provide genuine comfort to all believers who face oppression, for they remind us that unspeakable joy awaits those who belong to Jesus.

ARTICLE

How Can the Bible Affirm Both Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom?

by William Lane Craig

The biblical worldview involves a strong conception of divine sovereignty over the world and human affairs even as it presupposes human freedom and responsibility (cp. the accounts of Saul's death in 1 Sm 31:1–6 and 1 Ch 10:8–12). An adequate doctrine of divine providence requires reconciling these two streams of biblical teaching without compromising either. Yet this has proven extraordinarily difficult. On the one hand, the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective interprets divine providence in terms of predetermination, God choosing in advance what will happen. It is hard to see how this interpretation can preserve human freedom or avoid making God the author of sin, since (for example) it would then be He who moved Judas to betray Christ. On the other hand, advocates of revisionist views (e.g., open theism) freely admit that as a consequence of their denial of God's knowledge of future contingent events a strong doctrine of providence becomes impossible. Ironically, in order to account for biblical prophecies of future events, revisionists are often reduced to appealing to the same deterministic explanations that Augustinian-Calvinists offer.

Molinism offers an attractive solution. Luis Molina (1535–1600) defined providence as God's ordering of things to their ends, either directly or indirectly through secondary causes. In explaining how God can order things through secondary causes that are themselves free agents, Molina appealed to his doctrine of divine middle knowledge.

Molina analyzed God's knowledge in terms of three logical stages. Although whatever God knows, He knows eternally, so that there is no temporal succession in God's knowledge, nonetheless there does exist a sort of logical order in God's knowledge in the sense that His knowledge of certain truths is conditionally or explanatorily prior to His knowledge of certain other truths.

In the first stage God knows all possibilities, not only all the creatures He could possibly create, but also all the orders of creatures that are possible. By means of this so-called natural knowledge, God has knowledge of every contingent state of affairs that could possibly be actual and of what any free creature could freely choose to do in any such state of affairs.

In the second stage, God possesses knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions (statements of the form "If *x* were the case, then *y* would be the case"), including counterfactuals about what creatures would freely do in various circumstances. Whereas by His natural knowledge God knew what any free creature *could* do in any set of circumstances, now in this second stage God knows what any free creature *would* freely do in any set of circumstances. This so-called middle knowledge is like natural knowledge in that such knowledge does not depend on any decision of the divine will; God does not determine which counterfactuals are true or false. By knowing how free creatures would freely act in any set of circumstances He might place

them in, God thereby knows that if He were to actualize certain states of affairs, then certain other contingent states of affairs would be actual as a result. For example, He knew that if Pontius Pilate were the Roman procurator of Judea in A.D. 30, he would freely condemn Jesus to the cross.

Intervening between the second and third stages of divine knowledge stands God's free decree to actualize a world known by Him to be realizable on the basis of His middle knowledge. By His natural knowledge, God knows the entire range of logically possible worlds; by His middle knowledge He knows, in effect, the proper subset of those worlds that it is feasible for Him to actualize. By a free decision, God decrees to actualize one of those worlds known to Him through His middle knowledge. In so doing He also decrees how He would freely act in any set of circumstances.

Given God's free decision to actualize a world, in the third and final stage God possesses so-called free knowledge of all remaining propositions that are in fact true in the actual world, including future-tense propositions about how creatures will freely behave.

Molina's scheme effects a dramatic reconciliation of divine sovereignty and human freedom. In Molina's view God directly causes certain circumstances to come into being and brings about others indirectly through either causally determined secondary causes or free secondary causes. He allows free creatures to act as He knew they freely would when placed in specific circumstances, and He concurs with their decisions in actualizing the effects they desire. Some of these effects God desired unconditionally and so wills positively that they occur. Others He does not unconditionally desire but He nevertheless permits due to His overriding desire to allow creaturely freedom, knowing that even these sinful acts will fit into the overall scheme of things, so that God's ultimate ends in human history will be accomplished. God thus providentially arranges for everything that happens by either willing or permitting it, and He causes everything that does happen, yet in such a way as to preserve freedom and contingency.

(For another perspective, see the article in Isaiah 45, page 1054.)

2:13–17 Peter, like Paul in Rm 13:1–7, called upon believers to submit to the government. Do words like these support an evil structure such as the racist apartheid system formerly practiced in South Africa?

We need to recall what we noted above. Peter did not address believers who ran the government but believers who lived under the governing authorities. The few short verses here do not constitute a full-scale treatise on the Christian and government. Surely, Peter would have included other admonitions about the need for justice if he had directed his words to political leaders.

Neither should we conclude from these verses that governing authorities are to be obeyed without exception. Peter gave the general principle here, namely that believers should submit to the laws of the land and to the authorities enforcing those laws. But we know from the rest of the Scriptures that exceptions exist. Daniel refused to obey the law prohibiting prayer to Yahweh (Dn 6). The apostles rejected the words of those who tried to prevent them from preaching the gospel (Acts 5:29). Peter did not simplistically endorse whatever the government prescribes.

2:18–25 People today often ask why NT writers did not criticize the institution of slavery or advocate its overthrow. But we must recall the social situation of the young churches in the Roman Empire. They lacked political power and could do nothing to dismantle the institution. In

addition, NT writers were not social revolutionaries (see 1 Co 7:17–24). They did not believe that overhauling social structures would transform culture. Their primary concern was the relationship of individuals to God, and they focused on the sin and rebellion of individuals against their Creator. New Testament writers, therefore, did not complain about the oppression imposed by others but concentrated instead on the godly response of believers to mistreatment.

If enough individuals are transformed, of course, society as a whole benefits and the Christian faith begins to function as a leavening influence. We are keenly aware from history that Christians have too often failed to live righteously, and yet we may also fail to see that the Christian faith has been a force for good in Western civilization. History demonstrates the impact of Christian faith upon social structures. One of the consequences, under Christian influence, was the eradication of slavery. Christians, of course, have inflicted evil on others throughout the centuries as well. As sinners, we have left a legacy that is disappointing. A realistic appraisal of history, however, includes both the evil and the good that Christians have accomplished.

It is crucial to note that the NT nowhere commends slavery as a social structure. It nowhere roots it in the created order, as if slavery were an institution ordained by God. The contrast with marriage is remarkable at this point. God ordained the institution of marriage, but slavery was invented by human beings. The NT regulated the institution of slavery as it existed in society, but it did not commend it per se. Hence, Peter’s words on slavery should not be interpreted as an endorsement for the system, even if he did not denounce the institution.³

³ William Lane Craig, [“How Can the Bible Affirm Both Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom?”](#) in *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*, ed. Ted Cabal et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 1849–1853.