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Romans 15:13, 33 “A Blessing for the New Year”

Intro. This verse is Paul’s conception of one aspect of the Christian life as it should be. It is a great summary of the blessed life formed by our oneness with Jesus Christ. But our text envisions a life that is far different from that lived by many Christians. Too many lack hope when they face the darkness of suffering or death. Too many are bothered with sadness & worry. And how many Christians do you know that are filled with joy, peace, and hope, almost on a continual basis? Yet that is the kind of life that we *can* have, and that is the kind of life that I wish for you in this coming year.

The context of our text today is the appeal by Paul for spiritual unity. Differences of opinion concerning religious practices were dividing some of the Roman Christians. But Paul concludes his appeal for unity with v.13. In substance it points to the true remedy for religious controversy. Fill the contending parties with a fuller spiritual life, and their differences will begin to dwindle and look very contemptible. It’s like what happens when the tide rises. The little pools in the sand are all merged into one. And as the tide of our spiritual lives rise together, we can become one, and experience the unity that God intended for us to have.

So let’s look at the kind of spiritual life that God wants us to have. He wants to bless us. The Christian life is truly a blessed life if we live it as God intended. I challenge you to rise to the spiritual level that God’s wills for your life in 2006, and you will indeed be blessed. So let’s see first of all:

I. THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE BLESSINGS

There are 3 vital Christian blessings that I wish for you this coming year. The first is:

A. Hope – V.13 says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope....” Notice that God is “the God of hope,” and He wants us to “abound in hope.” Furthermore, Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil [calamity], to give you a future and a hope.”

What is hope, anyway? In the New Testament hope is not merely wishful thinking. Rather, the word “hope” indicates a positive future that is not seen, and yet, it is a certain, absolute reality. Our future is as bright the promises of God, which are as certain as God Himself. For example, I have a sure & certain hope that I am going to heaven when I die. I have a sure & certain hope that my mother & sister are in heaven. Why? It is because God has *promised* eternal life to those who have placed their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. And God cannot lie.

Hope is actually an indispensable quality of life, especially during times of difficulty. Years ago [1927] a Navy S-4 submarine was rammed by a Coast Guard cutter off the coast of Massachusetts and quickly sank. The entire crew was trapped in its prison house of death. Ships rushed to the scene of disaster. But bad weather hampered the rescue efforts. The next day they returned & a diver learned from the tapping of the dots and dashes of the Morse Code that only 6

had survived. It was estimated that the oxygen on board would last only 48 hours. Meanwhile, one of the attempts to rescue the survivors failed. Later, a diver placed his helmeted ear to the side of the vessel and listened. He heard another tapping noise. The question came slowly: "Is... there... any... hope?" This seems to be the cry of humanity: "Is there any hope?"¹ Well in Eph. 2:12 the apostle Paul says that before the Ephesians became believers, they were "having no hope and without God in the world." As it turns out, there was no hope for those sailors. They were not rescued in time. And without God, you have no hope, especially as you face death. But with God, you always have hope!

Some of these Roman Christians would soon suffer for their faith under the Roman Emperor Nero. Some would be arrested & tortured. Some would even be put to death in a horrible way. But with the hope that Paul speaks of, they faced the future with confidence and optimism, and that hope sustained them through their times of trial.

And as we face 2006, we may wonder what the New Year may bring. Will there be a major terrorist attack? Will earthquakes & hurricanes strike America? Will many lose their jobs as the economy changes? Will you find out that you or a loved one has been diagnosed with a serious illness? I tell you, the harder you look at the world, the more hopeless things seem to be. So we may be concerned, but we also have reason to hope. The attitude of the Christian mind ought to be a cheery optimism, an unconquerable hope. "The best is yet to be" is the true Christian thought in contemplating the future for myself, for my family, for God's church, and for God's universe.

And what is our hope? Rom. 5:2 says that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Yes, we are destined for the glories of heaven. And Tit. 2:13 says that our blessed hope is "glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The return of Christ will not only complete our salvation, but it will also bring salvation to the whole world. War & violence will end and there will be world peace. Poverty will be replaced with abundance, and every need will be met. The curse will be lifted. Oh yes, God gives us a wonderful hope.

Not only does God want to cause hope to abound in you, but secondly, He wants to fill you with:

B. Joy – This is a form of gladness & delight and is similar to happiness, but it is inward, independent of circumstances. In Jn. 16:22 told His disciples of a joy that no one would be able to take away from them. The joy that Paul is talking about is joy in the Lord & from the Lord. Gal. 5:22 says "the fruit of the Spirit is... joy."

Now God adds to our joy in different ways. For example, salvation brings great joy. In Acts 16:34 we see that the Philippian jailor "rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" [cf. Acts 8:8]. I hope some today will experience the joy of getting saved. Furthermore, praise brings joy. Psalms 9:2 says, "I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High." Seeing God work in answer to prayer brings joy. In Jn. 16:24 Jesus said, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Christian fellowship brings joy. Philemon 1:20 says, "Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord." And finally, hope produces joy. Romans 12:12 talks about "rejoicing in hope." Romans 5:2 says "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." So God gives hope, which also gives us joy.

A favorite old hymn of some was inspired by the glowing face of a man who seemed to live continually upon the lofty peak of consecration to God. Seeing him in the audience during

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 564 [#T-2273 & <http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=361> [Illus.#C-1468].

an evangelistic campaign, a famous preacher noticed his radiant expression. The message that night was about the return of Christ, and often the man with the shining countenance would exclaim joyously, “Yes, yes! And that will be glory for me!” After the service the speaker inquired, “Who is the brother with the blessed testimony?” “Oh, that’s old glory face,” replied his informant. “He’s a Christian who always seems to be on the mountaintop.” Later, Charles H. Gabriel was so impressed with that man that he was moved to write his familiar gospel song, “O That Will Be Glory for Me.”²

That’s the way it ought to be with us. We ought to live our lives with joy on our faces, as well as in our hearts. And as we think about our blessed hope, that will add joy to our lives.

There is yet another blessing that I wish for you this year. It is:

C. Peace – V.13 says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace....” This is most likely a reference to the peace of God, that peace which God gives. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Phil. 4:7 says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Do you have God’s peace? Do you have that sense of tranquility that all is well, for you are confident that a loving God is in control? Can you sing with the hymn writer, “It is well with my soul”? God wants us to have that kind of peace.

This peace begins with being at peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” A man can never, down to the roots of his being, be at rest until he is quite sure that there is nothing wrong between him and God. It is likely that some here today need to make things right with God. Then you can have God’s peace.

And so we see some of the blessings that God wants you to have. He wants you to have hope in a world that at times seems hopeless. He wants you to have joy in a world of sadness & depression. And He wants you to have peace in a world of turmoil and worry. So we see the substance of the blessings. Now let’s move on and see:

II. THE SIZE OF THESE BLESSINGS

We live in the day of the super-sized menu. You can order a super-sized Coke, fries, and a super-sized double or triple burger. That is not really good for your health. But God wants to super-size His blessings in your life, and that *is* good for you! The kind of life God wants you to have is not empty, but full. Note the words in v.13 that describe this abundance: “fill you” and “all” and “abound.” The word “abound” (*perissos*) literally means “to overflowing.” In the 23rd Psalm, David said that his cup “runs over.” Would you like to have life that overflows? Wouldn’t you like to have life that is full of all that is good? You can! In v.14 Paul says, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge....” Ephesians 3:19 speaks of us being “filled with all the fullness of God.” Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

God wants us to discover the spiritual abundance that He came to provide for us. For example, it is not just joy, but a fullness of joy that is spoken of here and elsewhere in the Bible. I John 1:4 says, “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” In John 15:11

² H.G. Bosch in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 681 [#2830 & C-].

Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” So God wants your life to abound in hope, and be full of joy & peace.

Is your life full of hope, joy, & peace? Or do you have hopelessness, sadness, or a troubled spirit? Well if you do not have fullness of hope, joy, and peace, then you especially need to listen to my final point. We have discussed the substance of these blessings, and the size of these blessings. Now let’s consider together:

III. THE STEPS TO RECEIVING THESE BLESSINGS

Paul tells us how to receive the fullness of these blessings. First:

A. By Understanding that God Is the Source of these Blessings – This prayer of blessing begins and ends with God. Furthermore, v.13 says that God is the God of hope. He is called the God of peace in v.33. And can it not be rightly stated that He is the God of joy? He is called such because He is the source of these blessings, and He generates these blessings within us.

So don’t look to the world for hope, joy, and peace. Now you can find temporary laughter & fun in the world, but not joy. You can get drunk or take drugs and dull your senses to the point that you create a false peace. But only the Spirit of God gives joy, and a true sense of peace. So look to the Lord as the source of the blessings of hope, joy, & peace.

Furthermore, we receive these blessings:

B. Through the Power of the Holy Spirit – Notice in the last of v.13 that Paul wishes “that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Yes, it is through the Holy Spirit that we have hope, and these other blessings. In fact, we know from Gal. 5:22 that joy and peace are among the fruit of the Spirit.

So seek the filling of the Holy Spirit as Eph. 5:18 commands. Follow the leading of the Spirit. Obey the Spirit. Rely upon the Spirit, and you will know fullness of hope, joy, & peace. Don’t try to produce this hope, joy, and peace from your own resources. Don’t look to the sinful or worldly sources of hope, joy, & peace. Instead, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. And this leads to the last step. We receive these blessings:

C. Through Faith – Once you understand the true source of these blessings, then the next step is to place your faith in God, who alone can fill you with hope, joy, and peace. Notice in v.13 that “all joy and peace” is ours “in believing.” So Paul wishes to drive home to us that the attitude of trust is the necessary prerequisite for God being able to fill a man’s soul. The best, the highest, the truly divine gifts which He is yearning to give to us all cannot be given except for the presence of faith. “Joy and peace” are results of genuine faith. It is in believing that joy & peace come to us and make their abode with us.

And so, as we place our faith in the promises of God, we have hope. As we place our faith in the sovereign purposes of God, we have peace. And as we trust God as our source of true, lasting happiness, we have joy. Let us be done with all that robs us of hope, joy, and peace, such as worry, which is the opposite of faith. Sin will take away peace & joy. Likewise, we can allow trials to rob us of peace & joy. Instead, let us place our faith in God.

Allen Emery wrote a book some time ago entitled, *A Turtle on the Fencepost*. In it he tells about the night he spent on the plains of Texas with a shepherd who was keeping two thousand sheep. He said that when evening came the shepherd built a fire for cooking supper

and also to provide some warmth. After the sun had gone down and the stars had come out, Emery says that he heard the wail of a coyote. In a few moments he heard the answering call of another coyote on the other side of the camp. At the sound of the coyotes the shepherd got up and threw some extra logs on the fire. In the light of the larger fire Emery says that he looked out at the sheep and saw thousands of little lights. He realized that these were reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep. Now here's the point: In the midst of danger, the sheep were not looking out into the darkness toward the danger, but were keeping their eyes set toward the shepherd. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." In the dark times of life we should keep our eyes on our shepherd, & trust in Him. He is the One who will sustain us with hope. He is the One who gives peace and joy.

And notice that Paul is talking about a present, ongoing faith. "Believing" is a present tense, which in the Greek describes continual or habitual action. So he is not referring to blessings received the moment you first believed and were converted. Instead, these blessings come to those who continue to exercise faith on a daily basis. Some Christian people imagine they can live upon past faith. You will get no *present* joy and peace out of *past* faith. If you would have a continuous flow of joy and peace, keep up a uniform habit and attitude of trust in God. It must be like the manna, gathered fresh every day. Is there, then, any wonder that so much of the ordinary experience of ordinary Christians should present a sadly broken line – a bright point here and there, separated by long stretches of darkness? The gaps in the continuity of their joy and peace are the clear indicators of the interruptions in their faith. The one who does not dwell in the Lord's joy and peace is simply failing to exercise the faith that God has given him. On the other hand, continual joy & peace is possible for the one who *continues* to exercise faith in God day by day.

So through faith we experience the blessings that I have spoken of today. For example, we can have joy through faith. 1 Peter 1:8 says, "Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." And we can have peace through faith. Whoever trusts is at peace. Prov. 31:11 says of the virtuous wife, "The heart of her husband safely trusts her." That is an illustration of what faith will do. And finally, we can have hope through faith. If I am living in an atmosphere of trust, then sorrow will never be absolute. If we believe God, we will have hope, for He has given us many wonderful promises regarding our future!

Conclusion: Don't you want to have these blessings in your life fully and continually? Don't you want fullness of hope, joy, & peace? God has provided these blessings through the work of Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, you must do your part. The starting place for some of you will be to trust in Jesus as your Savior. Remember, v.13 says that we have "all joy and peace in believing." In a moment I will invite you to trust in Christ as your Savior. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved, and you will begin to experience the blessings of hope, joy, and peace. You can begin to experience the joy of the Lord today!

If you are already a believer, but are lacking these blessings, then it is time to renew your faith & obedience in the Lord. At the beginning of this New Year, why not rededicate your life to the Lord. Get the joy and peace back in your life. Trust and obey. That is the way to be happy in Jesus. Do it now!

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Curtis Vaughan & Bruce Corley, *Romans: A Study*

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