

# Romans 15:13

---

M.W. Bassford

11/26/06

## Introduction.

- A. The other day, my wife and I were shopping for birthday presents for her grandmother, who turned 80 this month. Lauren thought that some stationery would be a nice gift, and, because her grandmother is a Christian, we started looking through the "inspirational" section of the stationery department. Eventually, we found some cards with a quote that said "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace. . ." It then trailed off in an ellipsis, and attributed the quote to Romans 15:13.
- B. Now, as soon as I saw that, I knew I didn't like that. I knew there was something missing from the quote, and that by removing those words, the card-makers had taken a verse with a specific spiritual meaning and stripped that meaning from it. All that was left was a warm fuzzy triviality that we might rephrase as, "Now may the God of optimism make you happy and contented," which barely sounds like Romans at all.
- C. Now, this is certainly just a greeting card, but it exemplifies a bigger problem with Bible scholarship in the denominational world and even in the church. The Bible is not a warm, fuzzy, and vague book. Instead, it uses language in very concrete, specific ways to make spiritual points that appeal not just to our emotions, but also to our intellects. However, because so many people are ignorant of the way that the Bible uses language, they lose the intellectual component of Bible study and reduce the word of God to the spiritual equivalent of a big, fluffy blanket. It warms, but it does not guide. Here's what Romans 15:13 actually says: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." However, just as this restores the full text of the verse, we also need to restore the full meaning of the verse. Let's devote ourselves this evening to the truth underlying Romans 15:13.

## I. The God of Hope.

- A. In order to understand what's going on here, we first need to understand who's doing it. We need to understand the God of hope. Now, that's exactly the sort of phrase a lot of people read right through, thinking that it's just throwaway Bible language. Brethren, this description of God is anything but throwaway. In fact, understanding just how God is a God of hope is central to our Christian faith. To gain this understanding, we need to turn to the best Bible dictionary and commentary ever written—the Bible itself.
- B. In Hebrews 6-7, we see the most complete Scriptural explanation of just why it is that God is a God of hope. The first key part of this explanation is found in Hebrews 6:13-18. God wanted Abraham to know that God would bless and multiply him. As the first part of this, He promised Abraham that he would be blessed and multiplied. Now, that would be enough for any of us, right? However, even though that promise was completely ironclad, it still wasn't enough for God. He emphasized His promise by confirming it with an oath. He swore by Himself that Abraham would be blessed and multiplied. As the Hebrews writer says, when we put that oath together with the promise, we get two unchangeable things, and it's impossible for God to lie in either one. This gives us encouragement to take hold of the hope that is set before us.
- C. But why? What does this whole promise-and-oath thing have to do with us today? Everything! The entire Christian belief system depends on a promise that God confirmed with an oath. It is described in Hebrews 11:17-22. The Father both promised and swore to Jesus that He would be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This is how we know that we can be forgiven of our sins at all. God didn't just promise it; he also swore it, and because of these two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we can confidently come before the throne of grace. We can eternally come near to God. God isn't a God of hope because of blind optimism; He's a God of hope because he has both promised and sworn to our salvation.
- D. This is so important to us because it tells us that if we follow God's plan of salvation, we can be 200% certain of receiving His grace. We have absolutely no reason to doubt. Let's put this in perspective by looking at the Muslim religion. Islam, like Calvinism, denies that man has free will. Paradoxically, also like Calvinism, this belief in predestination leads to an emphasis on works. The devout Muslim does everything he can to prove that he's one of Allah's elect, but he can never be certain of his salvation until he dies and learns whether Allah will have mercy on him or not. According to some radical Muslims, though, there is one exception. They believe that if a Muslim gives his life for Allah, he will go directly to paradise. This is what motivates suicide bombers. The certainty that every Christian has—and that we probably take for granted—of being right with God is something that is so precious to the suicide bomber that he is willing to both die and kill for it.
- E. Brethren, we need to make an effort to understand how precious this hope that we have is. I, for one, am enormously thankful that the Bible does not teach the Muslim belief system. My salvation is not up to some unknowable decision of God. I don't have to spend my whole life desperately trying to prove my own righteousness, because of what I do know. I know that right now, Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God, and He is making intercession for me and for all the sin that I have done, and that because of Jesus, all

that evil is gone forever. I can come before God on the day of judgment without fear, not because of myself, but because of the hope that I have in Jesus Christ.

## **II. All Joy and Peace.**

- A. When we return to Romans 15:13, though, we see that the God of hope also fills believers with all joy and peace. Once again, this is something that means a lot more than just the warm fuzzy that is apparent at first glance. Let's start by looking at peace first. When people who don't know the Bible think of peace, they think of either two nations that aren't at war with each other, or maybe some guy meditating on a mountaintop somewhere. Biblical peace is quite different. Ephesians 2:14-18 explains. Remember how Hebrews 7 talked about drawing near to God through the hope of Jesus Christ? This is actually an expansion of the same concept. Jesus is our peace because He brings us together with God. However, this is not the only fellowship that we achieve through Jesus. This passage also describes the way that Jesus brought together not just God and man, but also Jew and Gentile. Through Jesus we all have fellowship with one another too.
- B. This is important because it defines the way we need to see not just God, but also each other. It's simply not possible to be Christians without being drawn into a bond of unity with other Christians. It may well be that if we weren't Christians, we might have nothing to do with each other, but because we are Christians, we have everything to do with each other. It's just not up to us to say, "Well, I love God, but I don't much care for His children," and hold ourselves apart from the church or its members. When we reject the bond of peace that brings us together with our Christian family, we also reject the peace that brings us together with God. We are at peace with one another because God has made us at peace with one another, and we must maintain it.
- C. The idea of Christian joy is also inextricably bound to fellowship. There are lots of earthly joys we can have. For example, I am filled with earthly joy on the rare occasions when Mizzou wins a football game. However, this kind of joy is only temporary, and the joy of the Bible is eternal. Look at 1 John 1:3-4. John tells us here that the source of true spiritual joy is fellowship with God, His Son, and other Christians. Every Christian joy we can have boils down to this spiritual sharing, and only as we recognize this sharing can we have joy.
- D. Here's what we need to take from this. First of all, it tells us that as Christians, we should be happy people. We should go through our lives rejoicing, and if we don't have this kind of joy in our fellowship with God, there's something wrong. We need to do some soul-searching to figure out what is keeping us from the joy that God has prepared. Second, though, it tells us how important it is for us to seek and maintain close relationships with other Christians. As John says in 1 John 4:20, if we don't love our brethren whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? Sure, it's true that Christians are not perfect people. From time to time, Christians may well offend us. But so what? Despite the flaws, despite the imperfections, deep down inside, every Christian is a person who loves God and is trying daily to draw closer to Him. Every Christian has become in some small way a partaker of the divine nature, so that when we look at our brethren, it's as close as we can come to seeing God. That's why we should love them. That's why we should cherish them—because the things that tie them to God also inevitably tie them to us. That's where joy is.

## **III. That You May Abound in Hope.**

- A. Romans 5:13 continues on to say that joy and peace in believing will cause us to abound in hope. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16-17. Here's what's going on: The Thessalonians are wrestling with a problem. Some of their brethren have recently died, and they miss those brethren and mourn them. Paul tells them not to mourn as those who have no hope, because they DO have a hope. The Lord will return, and the dead in Christ will rise to be with Him, and then all Christians who are still alive will also be caught up in the clouds. Then we get to the key part of 4:17—"And thus we shall always be with the Lord." Here on earth, we have a hope, and that hope brings us into fellowship with God and with other Christians. However, our earthly fellowship is imperfect. Our imperfect love for God and for each other prevents us from being perfectly bound together. However, when the Lord returns, all of His brothers and sisters will be called together with Him, and we will be joined with Him and with each other in a perfect fellowship that will never end. That's why we should abound in hope—because the hope of Jesus Christ that blesses us so richly here will be intensified in heaven.
- B. According to the last clause of the verse, this abounding in hope will be caused by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, this doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit somehow zaps us and makes us get it. It's simply a reference to the great work of the Holy Spirit—the word of God. Our word "inspired" comes from the same Greek word as "Spirit," so it's completely accurate to say that all Scripture is the product of the Holy Spirit. Let's learn what God's word can do for us in Romans 1:16-17. The gospel is the power—there's that word again—of God for salvation, both the salvation we receive when we're baptized and the salvation we claim at the last time. It tells us not just how we can receive righteousness from God, but also to be righteous as God is righteous. The just shall live by faith, not merely in the sense of not dying, but in the sense of conforming their conduct to the hope that they have in God. It's the word that brings us into fellowship, both here and in heaven.

**Conclusion.** If you don't have this fellowship with God and Christians, come to the Lord today.