

THE SPIRIT OF HOPE

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” —ROMANS 15:13

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is considered Paul’s great chapter on love, and he concludes it with, “Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (13:13). We understand why the greatest is love because we know that God is love. We understand why faith is in that list as it is an essential ingredient in our relationship with God. Paul then throws into this trio of virtues the one we hardly ever talk about - hope. Hope does not sound as though it has the same force or importance as love and faith, and yet it may be that this is one of the most important ingredients we need in our lives.

The word hope comes across as a rather weak word. If someone were to ask you, “Are you a Christian?” and you answer, “I hope so,” they would probably think you are not too confident about that. If they were to ask, “Does your wife love you?” and you say, “I hope so,” they would most likely feel a bit dubious about your marriage, because the word ‘hope’ sounds uncertain, ambiguous, tentative, a little vague, and therefore we do not think of hope as being a particular virtue in any way. But actually it is.

The kind of hope Paul is talking about is not the wishful thinking kind, but a hope based on confidence and realism. It is the kind of

hope that may encourage and help us to orient ourselves outside of the present into a future, not as a form of escapism, but as an expression of realism. Many of us are often discouraged or have fallen into sin and feel regret, or perhaps we are simply aware of the tension, conflict and corruption all over the world. Hope is forward looking, and as believers in Christ, hope not only allows us to look forward in the present with confidence to a future God has planned, but also to the promises of God that help us in our present day struggles.

When human beings sinned, God cursed the earth and one day it will be liberated. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, with no more sin, pain, tears or shame. So while we need to be confident about what is “now”, at the same time, we realize there is a “not yet”, and we have reason to live, because the final chapter of the story tells us the best is yet to come, and this is characterized in our sense of hope.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for giving us a future that we eagerly look forward to, and which gives us hope in difficult times.

TO REFLECT UPON: How does the hope of God’s promised future help in my present struggles?