

2 Corinthians 13:14 “Trinitarian Blessings: Hope for 2018”**¹

Main Idea: If we’re going to live for Christ, we need encouragement to think about what we have. That’s what this message is all about. According to 2 Corinthians 13:14, we who belong to Christ have access to three incredible Trinitarian blessings.

Six important implications in light of the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14...

1. We don’t believe in a generic God, but in a Trinitarian God.
 2. We don’t believe in a complicated religious system, but in a personal God who has entered into a Trinitarian relationship with us.
 3. We don’t believe in a far off deity, but in a Trinitarian God who is with us and makes Himself known to us.
 4. We don’t believe in a God who has favorite children, but in a Trinitarian God who gives Himself fully to all who come to Him through His Son, Jesus the Christ.
 5. We believe in a Trinitarian God whose presence in our lives changes the way we look at problems and problem people.
 6. We believe in a Trinitarian God who has given us everything we need for doing everything He desires.
- I. May the grace of Jesus be with you.
- A. It’s our nature to be needy.
 - B. It’s our nature to give unmerited help (2 Cor 8:9).
 1. He became poor for us.
 2. We become rich in Him.
 - C. We need fresh experiences of what we have in Jesus.
- II. May the love of God be with you.
- A. Our Father does not love us because we are worthy.
 - B. Our Father loves us because we belong to His worthy Son.
 1. This makes us eternally secure.
 2. This gives us plenty of incentive to love others, even if they don’t do the same.
- III. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.
- A. We have a constant Trinitarian counselor (John 14:16-20).
 1. Jesus did not leave us as orphans.
 2. God Himself is always with us.
 - B. We have a constant Trinitarian companion (Romans 8).
 1. He enables us to overcome sin (Rom 8:5-11).
 2. He gives us the ability to live God-pleasing lives (Rom 8:12-14).
 3. He gives us assurance that we are God’s children (Rom 8:15-16).
 4. He helps us pray (Rom 8:26-27).

Make It Personal: If this God is our God, then we have reason to be hopeful in 2018.

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 13

You might find this sermon a little different from most I preach. Usually we go to texts that include some sort of exhortation. And so you will hear me say things like, “Brothers and sisters, this is what God’s Word says we need to do. Repent. Believe. Give. Forgive. Go. Pray. Etc.” Lots of exhortations. And there’s certainly a place for exhorting in preaching, since a lot of Bible texts show us that’s essential for how we grow and change.

But there are no exhortations in today’s text. No commands. No confrontations. No rebukes. Just a powerful reminder of what it is that makes it possible for sinners like us to follow those exhortations we keep reading and hearing about so truly can live lives that please the God who saved us.

Let’s turn our attention to 2 Corinthians 13:14. This verse has meant much to me, and I believe there’s much here for us as a church as we head into a new year.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ Adapted from a message preached at WBC on 9/23/12, “Some Post-Sabbatical Reflections about Our Incredible Trinitarian Blessings”

I've entitled the message, "*Trinitarian Blessings: Hope for 2018.*" Friends, my joy today is to remind you of what we have if we know Christ. I'm calling them *Trinitarian blessings*. I could call them *Trinitarian resources*, or *provisions of the Triune God* intended for your good and His glory. What are they? There are three, and here they are...

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)."

To appreciate these wonderful Trinitarian blessings, we need to consider the context. Our text is the *last verse*, sort of the benediction, of the second letter that the apostle Paul wrote to a local church in Corinth. Is that significant? Very. This is his final word to these believers, but he's had a lot to say to them previously.

It's no secret. The church at Corinth was probably one of the biggest sources of church pain in Paul's side. My guess is that he lost more sleep over this church than any other (save perhaps the Galatian churches who were on the verge of a complete defection from the gospel). Their relationship started in AD 50 when Paul went to Corinth during his second missionary journey and by God's grace and lot of suffering, he saw a baby church birth there (see Acts 18).

Paul loved his spiritual children in Corinth. He saw such great potential in this church. He knew they faced great challenges, for Corinth was a city, some estimate, of 250,000 freemen and 400,000 slaves, with twelve pagan temples, and rampant sexual immorality. So Paul worked patiently and persistently with this church.

He taught them on site for a couple of years. Later He sent Timothy to help them, and then later he sent Titus. He wrote at least four, maybe five letters to this church to help them deal with problems (and they had a ton of problems!). Two of those letters were Spirit-inspired and preserved in our Bibles. We call them 1 Corinthians, which Paul penned from Ephesus in the early part of AD 55, and 2 Corinthians, which he sent from Macedonia towards the end of AD 55.

I want us to get a sense of what Paul thought of this church, so let's scan 2 Corinthians 13. I'll give you three words that sum up what Paul thought of the Corinthians.

Personal (1), *problems* (2, 5), and *potential* (11).

First, *personal*. Look at verse 1, "This will be my third visit to you." This was a church that had received a lot of personal attention from Paul. He'd already spent a lot of time with them. He'd wept over them. He'd celebrated with them. He'd been attacked by them, which is why he'd sent Timothy and Titus to them and wrote 2 Corinthians, to repair his reputation in their eyes. And now he's coming again to minister to them for the third time. What we're reading is not some district superintendent form letter. These are the words of the spiritual father of this church who has a long track record to prove their personal connection.

Two, *problems*. In verse 2 he says, "I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others." What's he saying? He's saying there are still problems and problem people in the church that need to be addressed for the sake of Christ's reputation. And they need to address them, and if they don't, he will when he comes. Not because he's against them, but because he loves them so much, and most of all, loves to see them please their Savior.

Three, *potential*. In verse 11 he says, "Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace." What's that? *Aim for perfection?* Why did he say that? Because in addition to problems, that's precisely what this church had...so much potential, the potential to grow up into Christlikeness and to grow out and reach that part of the world for Christ.

So how do you finish a letter like this? What's the last thing you're going to say to the people you love after you've just challenged them to deal with their problems and live up to their potential in Christ? I love how Paul does it. He ends the letter by taking the focus off of himself and off of the Corinthians and puts the focus right on *God Himself*.

He ends with a *Trinitarian benediction*. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)."

I want to do two things with this benediction. First, I want to give you right up front six important implications that are true in light of 2 Corinthians 13:14. Then I want to back up and look carefully at the benediction itself and meditate on the three divine resources we possess.

Six important implications in light of the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14...

1. *We don't believe in a generic God, but in a Trinitarian God.* Notice that Paul specifically mentions the three members of the Godhead in his closing words to the church, "May the grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all."

"God bless America!" says the politician. And of course, he is usually very ambiguous about who he has in mind when he invokes this blessing. *God*, he says. In our day and age it's politically correct to talk about "God" in generic terms. Why is that? Because it's hard to offend someone when you use a term that allows the listener to define God as he pleases.

Paul doesn't do that. He doesn't close this letter with a generic, "God bless you." He makes it clear that we believe in the God who exists as three persons, the Son (here referred to as *the Lord Jesus Christ*), the Father (here referred to as *God*), and the Holy Spirit.

Friends, all Gods are not the same. Muslims don't believe in this God. Mormons don't believe in this God. In Paul's day, the Romans were very religious but they certainly didn't believe in this Trinitarian God. Neither did the Jews, for that matter. So wherever Paul went he spelled it out. We don't believe in a generic God, but in the one, true Creator God who has always existed as three eternal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a *Trinitarian God*.

2. *We don't believe in a complicated religious system, but in a personal God who has entered into a Trinitarian relationship with us.* Let's break that sentence into smaller chunks.

First, we don't believe in a complicated religious system. That's what the Greeks and the first century Romans had, an elaborate, fanciful, complicated religious system in which human beings tried to appease and earn the favor of the gods. We don't believe in that, nor in any other complicated religious system. That's not what Christianity is, though sadly, many keep trying to turn it into that. We believe in a personal God who has entered into a Trinitarian relationship with us.

Then notice the phrase "be with you all". "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit *be with you all*." Christianity is all about, not what we do to reach God, but what the Triune God has done, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to *be with us*. He is a personal God who enters into a Trinitarian relationship with sinners like us.

3. *We don't believe in a far off deity, but in a Trinitarian God who is with us and makes Himself known to us.* Again, far off deity is exactly what "God" was to the average person on the street in Paul's day, and it's not much different in ours. You didn't know God personally. If you were honest with yourself, you were scared to death of Him and just hoped you did enough to earn His favor in this life and eternal favor in the next.

But that's not our God, this far-off, unpredictable deity. We believe in a Trinitarian God—the Father who loves us, the Son who extends His grace to us, and the Holy Spirit whose

fellowship can be our present experience. We believe in a personal God who right now is with us and is making Himself known to us.

4. *We don't believe in a God who has favorite children, but in a Trinitarian God who gives Himself fully to all who come to Him through His Son, Jesus the Christ.*

Notice the last word of the benediction, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you **all**." Think of who Paul has in mind when he used that word "all." This is not a teacher's pet church. They've had cliques. They've had a man living in flagrant sexual sin. They've had people suing each other in the civil courts. They've had people spreading slanderous rumors about Paul. And Paul confronted all those issues head on in these two letters.

But now as he finishes, he uses one little word to make it perfectly clear that we don't believe in a God who has favorite children and others who've blown it too many times and are now sort of second class. No. We believe in a Trinitarian God who gives Himself fully to **all** who come to Him through His Son, Jesus the Christ. Be with you *all*.

5. *We believe in a Trinitarian God whose presence in our lives changes the way we look at problems and problem people.* Paul never gave up on people, I mean, *difficult* people. Five letters, three visits, countless tears. What kept him going with these challenging Corinthians? This did. When you know God the way Paul did, it changes the way you look at problems and problem people.

Friends, we believe in a Triune God who didn't stay isolated from our problems up in heaven, but took action. God the Father sent His only Son on a mission to earth to rescue rebels. And His Son died for them, and conquered death for them, and then sent the Holy Spirit to finish the work in them.

It changes everything, doesn't it? How could we ever throw in the towel on the very people in which the Triune God is working?

And on a practical note, I love what Paul does to end this letter. He refused to let the focus stay on the Corinthians, or on himself, but put it right on God, the Triune God. Sure, the Corinthians had problems, which he addressed for two epistles. And sure, he had to defend himself or some would discredit the gospel. But Paul makes sure that when it's all said and done, every eye is looking where every eye should be looking. To the Triune God.

6. *We believe in a Trinitarian God who has given us everything we need for doing everything He desires.* I'm not exaggerating. I'll say it again. *Everything* we need, for *everything* He desires. We have it. And we have it, not because of some innate potential, but because He has given it to us. But it's not just "it" as if it's something external to Himself. He has given us *Himself*. That's why we can now do everything He desires of us. We have divine resources, Trinitarian blessings.

There are three of them and they correspond to the three persons of the Godhead.

I. May the grace of Jesus be with you.

II. May the love of God be with you.

III. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

Is the order significant: Son, Father, Spirit?² It seems so. One commentator says the order has to do with our experience,³ for until you know the Son, you don't know the Father, nor the Spirit. But once you experience the saving grace of Jesus, then the love of the Father comes

² Paul usually concludes his letters, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you," as in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

³ Murray Harris, *2 Corinthians*, p. 405.

alive, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit becomes real. As another commentator elaborates by saying it's through the cross that we come to understand God's love and the experience of His Spirit.⁴

Beloved, if we know Christ, this is what we have. And I want us to know and affirm what we have as we face the challenges and opportunities of this new year. So let's meditate on our Trinitarian blessings one at a time.

I. May the grace of Jesus be with you.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...be with you all." Grace. What a great word, especially for human beings, such as we are. Why?

A. It's our nature to be needy. We are creatures, and as such were created to live dependent and interdependent lives. Dependent upon our Maker, and interdependent upon our fellow creatures. But because of sin, we have gone our own way. Yet that doesn't change the bottom line fact that it is our nature to be needy.

Do you like to be around needy people? It wears on you, doesn't it? I mean, we might help someone who can return the favor, or at least make us feel good with a nice "thank you." But what about people that keep needing? We call them sponges, and takers.

In reality, that's how God sees every one of us. We enter this world filled with needs, but living like it's our world and acting like everyone owes us, including God.

How do you treat people that treat you that way? You try to avoid them, don't you? You close up your heart and your resources to them, don't you? Which makes this so astounding. If it's our nature to be needy, and it is...

B. It's Jesus' nature to give unmerited help (2 Cor 8:9). That's what grace means. *Unmerited, undeserved favor and help.* Back in 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul reminded the church, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." What did Jesus do for us?

1. *He became poor for us.* Is this talking about economic poverty? Jesus certainly experienced that, for He was born into a lowly Jewish peasant home. But this goes beyond an earthly standard of living. Friends, we're talking about the Son of God who left the splendor of His perfect home in heaven to enter this sin-cursed world as a human being, and He humbled Himself and went down, down, down, all the way to a cross outside of Jerusalem. And on that cross, He took the penalty of sin for every person who would ever believe on Him, which meant He literally went down, down, down into the depths of a fiery hell in their place.

That's what it means when it says He became poor. And that's grace, unmerited favor and help. And because He did...

2. *We become rich in Him.* How rich? God now treats us, hell-bound rebels that we once were, as joint heirs with His beloved Son. Joint heirs! Full status children of God!

But here's where we struggle. We can know what Jesus did for us, and will do for us when we reach our eternal home. But we miss something. We need something.

C. We need fresh experiences of what we have in Jesus. And we need it now. This is present tense, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...be with you all." Paul is both stating a fact and praying a prayer that this fact will be realized. "Oh, Corinthian brothers and sisters! May Jesus' grace be with you. By that I mean, may you experience His unmerited help day by day, moment by moment."

⁴ Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 504.

Far too often the message we give people is, “Just try harder, and life will be better.” That’s not Christianity. Any religion could preach that message. Any atheist could, for that matter. This is Christianity. “My friend, you are a sinner, just like me, and you are in need. But here’s the good news. It’s Jesus’ nature to give undeserved help to sinners like us. It’s why He died on the cross and then conquered death. No question we have responsibilities, but here’s what makes our obedience possible. The grace of Jesus.”

Friends, we are needy. Jesus gives us what we need. It’s that simple. He gives us salvation. And day by day He gives us everything we need so we can live the life God desires, to His glory. We have everything we need to accomplish everything God intends.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

II. May the love of God be with you.

The benediction continues, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God...be with you all.” I should point out that Paul isn’t saying that the Father doesn’t minister grace to us, nor that the Son doesn’t love us, for other texts talk about the Father’s grace and the Son’s love. But in a very special sense, these are blessings that Paul wanted the Corinthian church to ponder, perhaps because of the unique challenges they were facing.

Notice how the persons of the Godhead help us in different ways. The Son ministers grace to us. The Father pours out His love to us. As we’ll see momentarily, the Spirit provides fellowship. The persons of the Godhead are equal in essence and worth, but not in function. Again, we don’t worship a generic God, but a *Trinitarian* God.

Here’s the Father’s blessing. May the love of God (the Father) be with you. Think carefully about this...

A. Our Father does not love us because we are worthy. Again, by nature, we are sinners who have gone away from God. That makes us worthy of God’s wrath. But this is amazing to ponder. Our Father’s love for us is not linked to our worth.

B. Our Father loves us because we belong to His worthy Son. Remember Jesus’ words on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” In essence, that’s why we have the Father’s favor this very moment, because He loves His precious and worthy Son so much, and His Son has cried in our defense, “Father forgive them. I’ve taken their place.”

Oh, how the Father loves you and me! The Son has brought us home, and now the Father lavishes on us the very love He has showered on His precious Son throughout eternity past. On the basis of His nature, God our Father will never turn away from us. How could He? He has adopted us into His family and given us the full status of sonship. He has already declared that we have an inheritance coming, and He doesn’t lie when He makes a promise.

Do you catch the significance?

1. This makes us eternally secure. To borrow Paul’s words in Romans 8, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Brothers and sisters, it makes all the difference in the world when you know you are loved by the God of heaven! It takes away fear of failure. What if I mess up? Will He stop loving me? No! How could He? It gives you incentive to try new things, even hard things. My

Father loves me, and it's His smile I'm living to see. And here's a very practical result of His love...

2. *This gives us plenty of incentive to love others, even if they don't do the same.* Right? How can we give up on people, even hard to love people, in light of the way God our Father so unconditionally loves us? In fact, think of it this way. Our Father's desire is for His love to flow right through us into the lives of those difficult people. That's why we have His love, not to hoard, but share, especially with people who need it most.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. And may the love of God the Father be with you. One more Trinitarian blessing...

III. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

The KJV says, "the communion of the Holy Ghost." It's the Greek word *koinonia*, which means "sharing, contribution, close mutual association, fellowship." There are two ways to take this. One is fellowship *with* the Holy Spirit. The other is fellowship *by* the Holy Spirit, that is, fellowship which the Holy Spirit produces between church members in Corinth. I think it's primarily the first, but it may well be both.

This is a wonderful blessing for believers. What does it mean in practical terms to say we have *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*? It means at least two things.

A. We have a constant Trinitarian counselor (John 14:16-20). That's what Jesus said back in John 14:16-20, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

Know this, brothers and sisters...

1. *Jesus did not leave us as orphans.* When He returned to heaven, having secured our salvation, He didn't leave us empty-handed to fend for ourselves. Before He left He told the apostles, "I'm going to send you *Another Counselor*." That's what the Holy Spirit is, everything that Jesus was to the Twelve, the Holy Spirit is to us, only more so, because He never has to sleep.

He is our constant Trinitarian counselor. He came on the Day of Pentecost, and helped the believers fill the Roman Empire with the good news of Jesus. In time, He guided the apostles and other apostolic representatives to write the New Testament books. And that's how He guides us now. He helps us understand and apply the Scriptures He's inspired. He is our Trinitarian counselor. Just think of what that means...

2. *God Himself is always with us.* Everywhere we go. Every challenge we face. He's always there. We have the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, who has come to counsel us.

That's what Jesus said. Later in the book of Romans the apostle Paul shed a little more light on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here's the second reality.

B. We have a constant Trinitarian companion (Romans 8). We don't have time to exegete Romans 8, but let me whet your appetite by highlighting what God the Holy Spirit does in the life of the believer day by day.

1. *He enables us to overcome sin (Rom 8:5-11).* Verse 11 says, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

He gives us life, life as it's meant to be, life that's truly life. That's the positive. The implied negative? He enables us to over what short-circuits this life. Sin. The Spirit of God who indwells us helps us put off sin and put on life, the very life of Christ Himself.

2. *He gives us the ability to live God-pleasing lives (Rom 8:12-14).* Notice verses 13-14, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Notice that the Spirit enables us to put something to death, the misdeeds of the body. Think sinful habits. Dealing with any? We have fellowship with the One who enables us to break those habits and live God-pleasing lives.

3. *He gives us assurance that we are God's children (Rom 8:15-16).* That's verses 15-16, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

What do we have? The Spirit of sonship. What's the evidence of that? He enables us to cry out to God in very personal terms, "Abba, Father." In doing so He gives us the assurance that we are indeed the children of God.

Have you cried out to God recently, "Oh, dear Father!?" If so, the Holy Spirit made that possible. And in doing so the Holy Spirit was letting you know that you indeed are one of God's children.

4. *He helps us pray (Rom 8:26-27).* Verses 26-27 are so encouraging, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

So when I say, "Oh, dear Father!" And I don't know what else to say, the Spirit speaks for me. And what He says is always consistent with the Father's will.

That's what I mean by a constant Trinitarian companion, my friends. And that's what we have because we have *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*

So let all this sink in. These are our Trinitarian blessings. We have them, and Paul is praying a prayer that God's people will experience them more fully every day. So should we pray. For our church family. For our kids and grandkids. For ourselves.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Think of what this means. For starters, there's no room for "I can't" when it comes to Christian obedience. Not because we're so strong or smart, but for this one reason. What God requires He Himself enables.

Friends, the Christian life will always be harder than we can do in our own strength, but never too hard for our Trinitarian resources. Our Savior provides the grace and help, our Father the love and support, the Spirit provides the fellowship and counsel. Our Trinitarian God provides us with everything we need. He didn't give us a bunch of rules. He gave us Himself, His Triune self. And so we have with us right now the grace of Jesus and the love of our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

It makes all the difference in the world knowing that the true and living Triune God is *with us.*

I received a letter a few years ago from Bill Amstutz, the president of Shepherds, a ministry to mentally challenged adults. Bill said something that caught my attention when he wrote, “We believe that all people are created by God on purpose and for purpose. I stress the ‘all’ because many people are prone to silently add, ‘except for people with disabilities.’ Some think that disabilities are an unfortunate accident, an aberration, an anomaly. People with disabilities are somehow ‘broken.’ At Shepherd Ministries, we insist that disabilities are not an accident. We challenge the notion that our Creator made a mistake when allowing some manner of disability... I’ve worked at Shepherds Ministries for over fourteen years and I know what God can do with intellectual disabilities. He uses them for His glory.”

And then Bill did something very helpful. He shared some true to life examples of the point he just made.

Kathy can’t walk without a walker. Her speech is very hard to understand. But Kathy knows the value of prayer, of communicating with her Holy Father. How simple it would be for many of us to go to someone and offer to pray with them in a time of need or praise. It would take very little effort, but we seldom do it. When Kathy sees any opportunity to pray, she unsteadily hobbles over, repeating “pray, pray, pray, pray,” until she talks to the Father with you. What an example to all of us!

Joel doesn’t say much. He’s one of our lowest functioning residents. But Joel radiates joy; his deep-seated delight with life is evident every day in his smile. How easy it would be for him to resent the lot he’s been given; to show his anger and frustration at all that he cannot do. But he doesn’t—he just smiles. What a different world this would be if we all found that joy and contentment whatever our circumstances.

Dennis was once just like you and me. He had a family, a home, a Master’s degree, a career as a pastor. He had a heart attack, went without oxygen to his brain and now has brain damage and very little memory. But through it all—the illness, the recovery, the many, many life changes, Dennis remembers who God is and how much He loves him. The first time I met Dennis, he was sitting in the lobby reading his Bible. He greeted me with a beautiful verse from Scripture. Even with a ‘disability,’ Dennis never forgot his purpose.⁵

If we’re going to make much of Christ in 2018, we need to affirm what we have. That’s what this message has been all about. 2 Corinthians 13:14 says that if we have been saved from eternal hell by God’s grace through faith in His Son, we have exactly what we need to live a joyful, hope-filled life.

Trinitarian blessings. We have the *grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*, and the *love of God*, and the *fellowship of the Holy Spirit*. We have the persons of the Triune God Himself working in our lives.

So here’s the bottom line. If this God is our God, then we have reason to be encouraged!

⁵ Dr. William J. Amstutz, letter from Shepherds Ministries, Union Grove, WI, August 2012.