Looking back at 2018 **[1]**

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Today the world celebrates (or commiserates) the passing of another year. It is the opportunity to reflect on the recent past, and to look towards the future.

Looking at my social media (not only recently, but throughout the second half of 2018), many of my friends have not had a good year. Many (who choose to wear their hearts on their sleeves) have struggled with health, relationships and material matters.

It is, of course, an oversimplification to say that an entire year was wholly good or wholly bad. We all laughed and cried at times, enjoyed a good meal or went hungry (if only briefly) for whatever reason. But I understand well that, taken as a whole, one can more easily remember a year for bad than for good, or vica versa. This year, despite there being many not so good experiences, it has been overwhelmingly positive for me, culminating in recently getting engaged to a beautiful and godly woman. For this reason, it is difficult to associate with people who declare the past year to having been overwhelming negative. And this is jarring, because for the previous three years, I was that person [2], where I had to force myself to remember the good through the negative experiences which came to me as a natural reflex. One year ago today I could not even muster doing that, and I chose to instead groan in silence before the Lord.

I am not without sympathy or empathy for those who have gone through difficult times. (And it is a prayer item that I, in times of plenty and happiness, will not forget those who suffer in the same way that I did.) I am also still very much cognisant of my own struggles. The good which I have experienced was because of God's goodness and grace. Yet when I did not have these positive experiences, I also experienced God's goodness and grace. When I did not have happiness, I had joy. When happiness one day again departs from me, I shall still have joy. And the joy which sustains me, as well as many of my friends, whether in a state of happiness or not, is this: that God's grace covers my failings and sins; that I am forgiven and made righteous in His sight; that I do not need to worry about tomorrow, because whether there be happiness, poverty or death, I have an eternal reward stored up for myself in the presence of my most previous Lord.

Happiness is not a reward for being good, nor is trouble a punishment for being bad (see and reflect on the book of Job). Joy is not contingent on happiness. God's grace and good gifts are not what makes us happy and prosperous, but what keeps us strong during trying times and humble during times of plenty.

May you grow in the knowledge in this God of grace and good gifts, through His Son Jesus the Messiah in the year to come!

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