



Ephesians

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But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
Ephesians 2:4

This thought picks up after verse 2:1 –

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ... But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,”

The intervening verses simply explained the details of our dead condition. They described living in a state of certain ruin from which there was no escape and only an inevitable and final bringing on of God’s wrath could be expected. However, as the Pulpit Commentary so beautifully states it, “Man’s extremity becomes God’s opportunity.” Where we were destined for certain destruction, God stepped in and redirected the situation for us.

The word “but” is emphatic and conveys the absolute sovereignty of God in the matter. We could do nothing. We were in an impossible state of death leading unto death. But God transcends our realm, and what is impossible for us is entirely within His abilities. And yet there is more. Not only is correcting the matter within His ability, it is a part of His very nature to take the action.

“But God” shows the absolute contrast between our helpless condition and God’s ability to correct it.

“Who is rich in mercy” reveals that mercy is a part of His nature. Just as He is gracious, truthful, holy, loving, etc., He is also merciful. It defines His character. And this mercy is “rich.” The Greek word gives the idea of “muchness.” He is simply abounding in mercy towards the objects of His affection. The mercy, therefore, streams from Him in abundance.

“Because of His great love” shows that the mercy is directly connected to His love. Just as mercy defines His nature, so does love. And as His mercy abounds, so great also is His love. It overflows from Him as a spring overflows its opening. The water is impelled up and out by the force of pressure. It is as if in Him, the outflowing of His love cannot be bottled up. Instead, it streams from Him towards His elect as is seen in the words, “with which He loved us.” Again, the Pulpit commentary notes that “the verb of love governing the noun of love makes the idea rich and strong. This view of the exuberance of the Divine attributes from which salvation has its rise is in harmony with the whole character of the Epistle.”

Paul’s explanation of what occurs towards us when we are “in Christ” is revealed throughout the letter, and it conveys to us the highest sense of God’s reaching out to His creatures, demonstrating His infinite attributes through the giving of His Son for us.

As the psalmist cried out, so should we also call out from our souls –

Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!
For His mercy *endures* forever. Psalm 136:26

Life application: When we fail to act as we should; when we really mess up and think, “How could God still love me?”; we can come to this verse and ponder it. Because of Christ, God’s mercy simply flows over us, His love surrounds us, and His eternal salvation continues to adorn us. Let us pick ourselves back up, and proceed on with pursuing Christ – who already pursued us!

...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), Ephesians 2:5

As seen in the previous verse, this verse, which is connected to verse 4, now ties us back to verse 1. Taken together, the thought goes –

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ... ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we

were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

We were “dead in trespasses and sins,” but God “made us alive together in Christ.”

This verse is, unfortunately taken to unnecessary extremes by those who hold to a monergistic approach to our salvation. Such is the teaching of “Calvinists.” In this, they will say that a person who is dead is dead. They can in no way make themselves alive, and therefore “regeneration precedes faith” (Tabletalk Magazine on Ephesians 2:1-10).

In other words, God sovereignly chooses who will be saved; He then “regenerates them in order to believe; and then they believe. In essence, they are saved in order to be saved. In essence, a person is saved before they believe, not after. The belief is a result of their salvation, because regeneration of the Spirit is the saving mark of God (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). RC Sproul states their ideology this way –

“You have as much power to awaken yourself from spiritual death as a corpse has the power to awaken himself from physical death.”

In this, a serious category mistake is made. Just because a person is *spiritually* dead, it does not mean that they are completely dead. A functioning brain is a part of human existence... well in most cases! The spiritual connection between God and man is cut, but this does not mean that man is incapable of doing good things, nor is he incapable of seeing what is good and pursuing it. In the giving of Christ, God makes an offer to fallen man. Man sees this good work of God in Christ and chooses, of his volitional free-will, to accept it or reject it. If it is accepted, then He is deemed righteous by God, justified by the work of Christ, and regenerated in his Spirit.

Sproul is correct that we cannot awaken ourselves from spiritual death, only a work of God can do that, but that work of God comes not from being “regenerated in order to believe,” but rather from an act of the free will in man which then triggers God’s regeneration of our Spirit. This is what Paul is referring to when he says that God, “...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” Our spirits were dead, but God made them alive – not before, but after we believed.

Albert Barnes goes further with Paul’s intent. He says (underlining added) –

“The construction here is, “God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love which he bare unto us, even being dead in sin, hath quickened us,” etc. It does not mean that he quickened us when we were dead in sin, but that he loved us then, and made

provision for our salvation. It was love to the children of wrath; love to those who had no love to return to him; love to the alienated and the lost. That is true love - the sincerest and the purest benevolence - love, not like that of people, but such only as God bestows. Man loves his friend, his benefactor, his kindred - God loves his foes, and seeks to do them good."

Although it is true that we were dead in sin when we received Christ, Barnes argues that this isn't the main point of the thought. Rather, he says that the focus is on God's love towards us, even in our deadened state, and thus He made a way for the correction of that state. The concept of monergism, being regenerated in order to believe, is erroneous and leads to other major faults in one's theology.

The final words of the verse today are that "by grace you have been saved." Grace is unmerited favor. It is getting what you do not deserve. We are the offenders, but God graciously forgives our offenses through the gift of His Son.

Life application: Forced grace is not grace.

...and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:6

By taking this verse with the previous one, we can see Paul's intent more clearly –

"...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus."

His words are tying our state directly to the work of Christ.

He was crucified for our sins and was buried; we were "dead in trespasses." He was brought back to life because He had no sins of His own; we were made alive together with Christ (because our sins were dealt with through His cross). He was raised from the tomb; we were raised up together. He was seated in heaven; we are made to sit together in the heavenly places in Him.

What occurred with Christ is what has happened to us in the same order; the two parallel, Christ being the pattern for those who would follow after Him. These actions are described by Paul in the indicative. They are a simple state of fact concerning what has occurred. He has raised us up, and He has made us to sit together. In God's dealings

with us, it is an accomplished fact. We are merely awaiting its actual occurrence. Christ's resurrection and seating in the heavens guarantees our entrance there as well.

In fact, Vincent's Word Studies notes that when the word "together" is used for the translation, it is ambiguous. To clarify its meaning, he notes that the Greek more fully reads, "Even now we sit there in Him, and shall sit with Him in the end." The deal is done. Just as Christ is seated on His heavenly throne, we are – ipso facto – seated there with Him.

These things are, as Paul notes, done by God "in Christ Jesus." The term is used to show that we are not simply granted these privileges because of His work, but somehow at a distance. Instead, they come to us because we are intimately connected to Him; united to Him through faith. What occurred with Him, indeed occurs to us as well.

Life application: We may, from time to time, do something so utterly stupid that we might feel that we have blown it with God - once and for all He has rejected us because of our failings. Paul's words show that this is incorrect. By faith in Christ, we are united to Christ. God could no more reject us now than He could reject His own Beloved. Deal done. The victory is secure.

...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

This has been one continuous thought since verse 4 which contrasts the thought of verses 1-3. The words "that in the ages to come" are set against verse 2 which said, "the course of this world" which implies the past times in humanity during which the mystery of Christ was hidden. This is described by Paul in Colossians 1:26, 27 –

"...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

In Christ, the mystery is revealed. Throughout the ages, it will be a source of richness to those who are His redeemed. This is that "He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The words "He might show" are in the middle voice. Thus they denote that God intends that these things are done to reveal His own glory.

What is anticipated in these coming ages is to be revealed in “the exceeding riches of His grace.” The grace of God is one of His defining attributes. It is a part of His very nature. However, God cannot be gracious or merciful without also executing justice in a display of His righteousness. He cannot violate one of His defining attributes in the process of granting another. Therefore, these riches of His grace are revealed “in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

It is through the work of Christ that God’s righteousness, His justice, His mercy, His grace, and so on all shine forth in one dazzling display of who He is. Further, the Greek word *en* or “in” is given to show that only those who are “in Christ Jesus” are the recipients of this. The KJV unfortunately translates this as “through.” Because of this, it could include anyone. But such is not the case. It is only those who are “in Christ” that will receive this marvelous grace.

The Pulpit commentary describes the kindness of God towards those who are in Christ – “Kindness in the **matter** of the blessing, forgiving us freely, and accepting and adopting us in him; kindness in the **manner** of the blessing, dealing with us as Jesus dealt with the woman that was a sinner, or with the thief on the cross, or with Peter after he had fallen, or with Saul of Tarsus; kindness in the **extent** of the blessing, providing amply for every want; kindness in the **duration** of the blessing – for evermore.”

The work of Christ is the proof of what is now realized and what will continue to be realized in the ages to come. It is thus to be an encouragement for us, right now, as we await its final consummation. We have an absolutely sure and trustworthy hope because of the work of Christ.

Life application: Marvelous things lie ahead as we walk in the presence of the King of the ages.