Ephesians 2:4-7: But God

The Eternal Character of God Eternally Applied

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

# But God

Paul is pivoting from the previous verses where the lusts of the flesh were reigning and condemning in the lives of those under Adam. The pivot is not a minor pivot but draws attention to the character of God. We find a tension between God’s righteousness and His love that can be reconciled only in Christ, which allows the love to manifest in our receiving mercy and then an eternal outpouring of grace to us.

Salvation was conceived, planned, and orchestrated by God. As we find in the counsel of the whole word of God, His involvement was not only required, but it was rooted in His will. “But God,” seems like a small fragment of text to derive doctrine, but Paul’s use of it here demands we consider Him, and His establishing a system that satisfied His demand for righteousness and was outside of what man could conceive.

*What happens to our Theology when we remove God from the center of it?*

## Because of His Great Love with Which He Loved Us

Love gets its definition in God: It is the perfect expression of patience, kindness, humility, unoffended, begrudging, righteous, rejoicing, harmonious with (and reflective of) truth, endures all, entrusts all, and hopes for all (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). God is able to express love perfectly and in ways that don’t conflict with His other characteristics. God’s righteousness and justice are not violated by His love because they are fitted together.

God’s love is directed towards us. This does not put us in a vulnerable position where there may be unrequited love in the believer because when we respond in faith our eternal salvation is secured and no matter what we do after that His love begets something: mercy and mercy affords grace.

*How has God loved us?*

When we consider John 3:14-18 we see that God’s love was rooted in His character, it motivated action from all three parts of the Trinity and caused eternal changes to the life of His creation. The Father loved His creation so much that He sent His Son, His Son obeyed and lovingly went, and the Spirit directed the Son’s steps all the way to the cross where He sacrificed Himself to be a substitution for all of Adam’s race.

## Being Rich in Mercy

*What is Mercy?*

We need a working definition of mercy that is greater than “When we don’t get what we deserve.” We may say that mercy is God’s disposition toward kindness, rooted in love, so that He may overlook sin while we’re on the earth due to Christ’s adequate work on the cross. This definition directly leads us into grace where His disposition to kindness then leads to the blessings of grace. While grace is eternal (see verse 7) mercy is temporal and we are not called to grow in it (2 Peter 3:18).

### God’s Richness

God’s wealth is something that we find outlined in a few different ways:

* God is rich, but is generous with His infinite wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9, 1 Timothy 6:17, Romans 2:4, Romans 9:23, Romans 10:12, Romans 11:33)
* God’s riches are described as mercy (Ephesians 2:4), wisdom, knowledge (Romans 11:33), grace (Ephesians 1:7), glory and empowerment, strength of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), material supplies (Philippians 4:19), and hope (Colossians 1:27)

Since God does not hoard His riches we see that we are His benefactors.

There is no scarcity in God. When we are surrounded by worldly thinking we find that there is a fear and scarcity is often the root of it. God, who is not defined by scarcity, brings peace as a result of this through His provision and will.

*Why is it critical that God be rich in mercy?*

If we think of mercy as a limited commodity then there is something that might not be reliable or available, but God’s character offers mercy (through love) generously. If He were not rich in mercy then His move to shut all up in sin so that He could show *only some mercy* would be terrifying [contradicting Romans 11:32 which says He desires to show all mercy].

## Even When We Were Dead in Our Transgressions

Complementing Romans 11:32 we find that all are in sin or transgressions and we desperately need His mercy. Paul highlights God’s willingness to do this when we had no relationship. We were separated in our transgressions and our unrighteousness was deserving of consequences. *That is agape, benevolent love!*

# Identification Truths

## Made Us Alive Together with Christ

Christ’s work was given, once and for all, on the cross so that we could be identified with Him in a new and previously unheard-of way. If we were separated before in death, we were united through identification and the separation was gone replaced by a union that was not before present in Adam in the garden. Adam was merely made in God’s image and walking with God – we have a been made alive with Christ!

*Whose life are we living anyway?*

Not only does that life change my relationship with God positionally, it changes my life conditionally. Galatians 2:20 tells us that we were identified with Christ and now our life is not just our conditional life, but a life bound with the power Christ’s life.

## By Grace You Have Been Saved

While translated often with a parenthesis this tiny little fragment of the New Testament pushes us into a critical area of theology: salvation is not of our own doing. Salvation is something done for us and we simply receive the gift of salvation through God’s planned, executed, and perpetual blessing of grace.

## Raised Us Up with Him

As if being made alive wasn’t enough, there is a deep connection also with Christ’s resurrection. In theological circles the word ‘imputed’ gets used a lot. Imputed means to be credited or accounted as having something. This is *not* the way that Paul talks about identification. We were not simply imputed life, we were not imputed resurrection, but we were identified with Christ in these things: His death, burial, resurrection and seating.

*What raised Christ up?*

Being identified with Christ in His being raised up is to be identified with Christ in a massively powerful event. As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “…to those being saved it is the power of God.” God’s authority is infinite, eternal, and ultimate. God can speak and the universe (or a new universe) is created. His might and power can raise life from the dead and His power raised Christ and made Him, and us, alive.

## Seated Us with Him in the Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus

Furthermore, beyond the miraculous identification with Christ in His life, and His resurrection, we are identified with His seating in the heavenly places. God specifically loved us and willed for His mercy to be shown so that the majestic and eternal outcome of that relationship would be eternal life and an eternal position. This new relationship is also outside of the confines and earthly limitations of this worldly body. The time will come when our position and condition will be united and the frailty of this body will be done away with.

*Where specifically is this heavenly place?*

We see in Colossians 3:1-3 that Paul re-iterates these identification truths and tells us that we’re seated in the heavenly places with Christ at the right hand of God awaiting Christ’s return and assumption of the throne.

## So that in the Ages to Come He Might Show the Surpassing Riches of His Grace

Every time we talk about grace we find ourselves wrestling with the problem of the over-simplistic definition of, “when we get what we don’t deserve,” or, “God’s covering for our sins.” These are unsatisfactory for many reasons, but they simply cannot reflect the idea of riches (plural) of grace!

We have the eternal state to look forward and if grace was merely a covering for sin we would have to be dwelling on or committing new sins to have that definition work. Instead we understand Grace to be the unmerited, unlimited blessings of God due to the totally adequate work of Christ on the cross.

*What does this verse teach us about our heavenly state as citizens?*

What is further is that we will be complete in our position and condition, we will not be tainted by sin and the adamic flesh, but we will be continuing to grow! Eternity will not be boring and redundant. Instead it will be us being in awe as we learn and grow in our knowledge of grace forever.

## In Kindness Towards Us in Christ Jesus

If mercy is a disposition of kindness towards us despite our sins while on the earth, God has an eternal plan of kindness towards us due to our identification with Christ. We saw that love has, as a part of its whole, kindness. We can rest in that kindness and know that it is not temporary, it is not conditional, it is secured and guaranteed in Christ.

*What about suffering?*

Paul’s reference to kindness here is in and due to relationship with Christ. Paul is not promising a lack of suffering, he is testifying to God’s kindness in Christ on into eternity. When our identity, citizenship, and position are all united in eternity, at the rapture, all of the suffering of the bride will be history. We will be walking in only newness of life as Christ’s bride. Christ’s bride gets God’s kindness forever.

# Conclusion

God’s plan for those who believe has been from before the earth’s creation (1 Peter 1:20) that we may be recipients of God’s love, His kindness, and grace on into eternity. When we consider that all of time and space are part of His plan it is overwhelming with awe, hope, and glory.

*How much more do we have to learn about God’s grace due to His love and mercy?*