

The Love Mercy And Grace Of God

Ephesians 2:4-7

4 . . . 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), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

Here in these few short verses of scripture, we find the three most blessed attributes of the character of God, “love”, “mercy” and “grace”! . Out from these three, flows all of the goodness and all of the wonders that our minds could ever think or imagine about God. Verse 4,

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), (Ephesians 2:4-5)

These words tell us that because of God’s great love with which He has loved us, mercy flows out from Him towards us even while we are still dead in our trespasses and sin even when we are at our very worst, and with unmerited grace, He makes us to come alive together with Christ.

And note, that all that God is and all that He does always begins with “love”, not our love towards God, but with His love towards us. And may I say again, it is always that way, and it will always be that way. Love, mercy and grace always begin with God and His love. He is always the source, the beginning, the well-spring of all good things.

Why would that be so? Why can’t we initiate love, mercy and grace? The reason is as simple as these words tell us it is. And it is exactly as we said in last week’s message. Before we are made alive through His love, mercy and grace, we are dead! Though alive in our flesh, our souls are completely and utterly dead, and utterly incapable of being or doing anything of goodness or value or worth. Those words again, verse 4,

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), (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Some do argue that even in our dead condition we are still aware of our need for God, that there is a void, an emptiness within us that cries out to be filled, that that is why for as long as we remain in our lost condition we are constantly searching for something to fill that emptiness.

And I understand their argument, because I can recall that sense of emptiness and the constant searching that took place in my own life before God's great love, mercy and grace filled that empty void in my soul.

But that is simply the nature to the special kind of death that infects every unsaved soul. It is death, but it is also a constant dying, a continual suffering that seeks reprieve from anything that will bring relief.

But unfortunately, until God reaches towards us, our outstretched hands find only the most destructive answers to our dilemma . . . immoral behavior, drugs, alcohol, money. Perhaps it is a foretaste of the kind of death spoken about in the Book of Isaiah, the kind of death that will be suffered in hell where . . .

24 . . . their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched."

(Isaiah 66:24 (NKJV))

Those words put an image in my mind of a poor, squirming creature, caught up in the never-ending throes of death. I am so glad that God chose to reach into my life and to draw me to Himself, else this condition of death would still be my lot, a continual squirming and searching but never finding relief from my suffering.

And again, as these words tell us, relief will always come first from God's loving hand and not our own. He is ever and always the "first cause" of all that takes place both in heaven and on the earth. And it will always flow out from His great reservoir of love, first His mercy and then the eventual favor that will bless us most, for all eternity, His "grace".

And please do take note here that "mercy" must come first, ahead of "grace". Why would that be so? Too often, we use these two words, "mercy" and "grace" almost interchangeably as if they meant the same thing. But while they do share some of the same meaning, they are also very different words.

One dictionary defines "grace" as being, "a spontaneous gift from God to man - "generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved divine favor, love, clemency, and a share in the divine life of God." And I especially like this definition.

But "mercy" has a different meaning and it is best defined in more legal terms. It is the decision on the part of someone who has the power, position and responsibility to exercise justice for wrongs that have been done, to withhold the deserved and just punishment for those wrongs.

And may I say that “mercy” presents God with an especially difficult dilemma, because God is a “just” God and is always “Holy”, which prevents Him from simply setting aside the “just” punishment for wrongs that have been done.

Folks, the law of God is holy and it is right. And before God is able to give out His free and unmerited grace, His holy law must first be honored and followed to the uttermost! It is my observance that we “New Testament” believers live with a serious misconception regarding the holy Law of God. We seem to think that God’s law was completely nullified, done away with by “grace”. And such is simply not true and not the intent of the words of scripture. As Jesus said very clearly in Matthew 5 . . .

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18 (NKJV))

The “law of God” is ever and always in effect and must be applied to any and every thing that takes place in our lives. And thus brings the need for mercy!

As we have read, in verses 1-3, we were

1 . . . dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
(Ephesians 2:1-3)

Folks, this is unrighteousness all the way down to the core of our being. And left to remain in that condition, we are deserving of nothing less than the eternal death that I mentioned a moment ago, where

24 . . . their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched.”
(Isaiah 66:24 (NKJV))

This is your and my “portion”, and we deserve it. But thanks be to God, and thanks be to His great love, He is bountiful in His mercy towards us. Verse 4,

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), (Ephesians 2:4-5)

But how did God solve the great dilemma that was presented to Him regarding sin and regarding “mercy”? The dilemma was solved when His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus stepped forward and gave His life to pay the penalty for all of the wretched unrighteousness that we read about here. Verse 1,

1 dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
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Mercy does not come easy or without cost, your debts, my debts spoken about here must be paid. The “Books” spoken about in that “Great White Throne” judgment must be reconciled and our name must be written there without any opposing debt to its account.

It is only then, after Jesus’ blood was shed to pay for our debt, and God’s mercy has first been applied to our sin and our trespasses that God is able to begin to show His great “Grace” to us, that spontaneous gift of - "generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved grace", His divine favor, love, and clemency, and a share in a divine life with Him.

How then does that divine life of grace begin to manifest itself to us? The words of verses 6 and 7 tell us. Listen!

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

These words “raised us up together with Christ” speak of our being “resurrected” with Him. While verse 7 speaks of the ages to come, this resurrection actually begins immediately upon our receiving the blessed grace of His salvation. The words of Romans 6 give us a closer look at the “new condition” of grace that we enjoy in our resurrection and our “new birth” in Christ. Read along with me these words in Romans 6, and recall the words that we are studying here in Ephesians 2! We are plainly told that we were dead, completely dead, utterly dead, but now are made alive. We have now been “resurrected” to a new life. Read along with me in Romans 6 . . .

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the

body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (Romans 6:1-8 (NKJV))

Verse 11,

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14 (NKJV))

As Christ died our death there on the cross, the dead nature within us literally and actually died with Him, both of us dying at the same time. Yes, that is a mystical concept, too deep for our ordinary mind to comprehend but folks, it did happen. There on that cross, 2000 years ago, somehow I died, you died. Yes, it is only now effectual, but the reality is, our dead nature died with Christ in His death.

And now, we are being made alive with Him, resurrected to new life, a life that is no longer consumed by and controlled by sin. We are now completely and utterly free from the power and the control of sin and our sin nature. That's hard for us to believe, considering how we continually battle with the attacks of sin, but it is still nonetheless true.

Remember, temptations are just temptations. They are not sin unless and until we give in to them. And we don't have to give in. That is some of the guarantee of "grace". Grace is a powerful force that protects us from the power and control of sin.

How does that work? It works simply and completely because of the presence of Christ abiding within us. He is our power! He is our self-control! He is our Protector, our Defender, our Shepherd.

We will talk more about "grace" next week, but for now, may we close with these words from Ephesians 2:4-7 (NKJV)

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), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He

might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7 (NKJV))