

## The Mercy of God Ephesians 2:4-7

### Introduction

We have begun Ch. 2 with the bleak picture of man's condition in sin

Man is dead in his trespasses and sins

There is a supernatural being named Satan – that is at work in our world – energizing / fueling evil and rebellion against God

Man as he stands now – apart from grace is under the condemnation of God for His sin

This world is such a mess that some people wonder why God bothered to create it at all  
Some – of an even more irreverent nature – even claim that they could have created a better world than this one – [of course they don't get very far if they make the attempt]

Others look at the evil in our world and use it as an excuse for unbelief

Secular Jewish Rabbi – Sherwin Wine had relatives who died in the holocaust

His view of God is that the nicest thing he can say about God is that He doesn't exist

If there is a God – is He too weak to do anything about evil?

If He does have unlimited power – why not put a stop to evil in progress?

Why not strike the murderer in the act with a heart attack or something?

Does all this sin and evil in God's creation somehow reflect upon the God who made this world – and diminish His glory or cast Him in the shade?

How can God's nature be vindicated – when His world has become the scene of so much evil, suffering and death?

Theodicy is the branch of theology that addresses such questions

The ultimate answer is that God will put things right in His time

Lauren Daigle: 'You'll take all that is wrong and make it right.' [theodicy on a personal level]

Spurgeon: 'Brethren, there are many things that God doeth which we cannot understand now, and probably never shall. For instance, why He permitted evil at first and tolerates it still. To this enquiry the divine answer would be: 'What I do Thou knowest not.' Leave that alone. It is our highest wisdom to be ignorant where God has not enlightened us.' [MTP 22, p. 267]

Spurgeon says – it is an unfathomable mystery – we are finite creatures - - - God is so vastly above us

Still - - - God's glory seems to be temporarily diminished thru the Fall – and the entrance of sin and death - - - all these people under the sway of Satan – killing / wars / aborting babies

Joel Rosenberg [speaker at the Family Leader Dinner] mentioned the abortion issue in America – 60 million babies have been aborted since Roe vs. Wade - - - Joel is a Jewish Christian – when he makes the point that – that is the holocaust times 10 - - - you feel the argument

He says, 'why is God allowing the U.S. to continue on?'

He referred to several possibilities

60 million evangelicals in this country [God said he would spare Sodom if there were 10 righteous]

The U.S. has been an ATM machine for world missions [far and above other nations]

Sin is global – not just in the U.S.

One can just as easily ask why God allows this world to continue on with its evil?

God's answer on one hand is that there will come an end – a Day of judgment / the wicked are storing up wrath for themselves which they will meet in eternity – there will be justice

A 2<sup>nd</sup> response – is that God [in the meantime] is rescuing a people out of the mess of this world who will show the surpassing riches of His grace [now and] in the ages to come

The program of salvation results in the vindication of God - - - magnifies His grace, mercy, and love - - - while also allowing room for His justice

**MLJ: 'This is to me the most overwhelming thought that we can ever lay hold of, that the Almighty, Everlasting, Eternal God is vindicating Himself and His holy nature and being, by something that He does in us and with us and through us.'**

Sinners ruined by the Fall are being redeemed by the grace of God thru the work of Jesus Christ

## **I. But God . . . - v. 4**

This section moves on to describe the present position of the believer

Something amazing has happened

vv. 1-3 describe this horrible predicament man had put himself in

**What has man done?**

He has rejected God

He has brought ruin to himself thru his sin  
He willingly placed himself under the sway and influence of Satan  
The sinful nature of man is passed on to generation after generation

The whole history of humanity is one long parade of sin and folly

Fallen man uses his faculties – his free choice / his will – to choose sin / evil

He uses his mind to / his intellect to develop poison gas to kill others with  
He uses his medical procedures not only to save lives – but to kill babies  
He uses media technology to broadcast filth and porn / wicked ideologies over the internet /  
etc.

What should God do? [He should use His power to obliterate this world and start over]

Of course – the minute we say that – we need to recognize that we are asking for Him to  
obliterate us as well - - - apart from Christ - - - that's where we all began

We do find some sins more abominable than others – but in the end – all sin is the  
outworking of a rebellious heart - - - the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes and boastful pride  
of life – of which all are guilty to varying degrees

This is the problem the atheist fails to grapple with – the problem isn't just out there - - - it's  
in here – in his own heart

We can't blame and condemn God for giving others the freedom to live by their choices -  
and ignore the fact of our own abuse of that same freedom given to us

**Rom. 3:23 - 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'**

We might paraphrase: 'all have abused their freedom and have contributed to the mess that  
this world has become.'

This is where we come to the stunning news of the gospel – and what it means

Where we might expect to find wrath and judgment - - - - we come to something completely  
different: grace / mercy / love

'But God being rich in mercy . . .'

MLJ: 'With these two words [But God . . .] we come to the introduction to the  
Christian message . . . these two words in and of themselves, in a sense, contain  
the whole of the gospel. The gospel tells us what God has done, God's  
intervention; it is something that comes entirely from outside us and displays to

us that wondrous and amazing and astonishing work of God which the apostle goes on to describe in the following verses.'

Man lives a life in opposition to God's commandments – he merits for himself the wrath of God

God would have been completely justified if He just abandoned the whole human race – but instead we find that in love He reaches out to sinners in love / mercy

Mercy – ελεος = undeserved kindness

Salvation is not something the sinner deserves

Jesus portrays this aspect of God the Father in the parable of the prodigal son – the Father welcomes home the son with open arms

### Luke 15:11-24

There is a picture of man in sin

He is driven by his desires / his lusts / his pursuits / his vanity - - - and it takes him far away from God

He has brought ruin to himself and his situation

His actions are a disgrace to his father / and to the family name  
The Father has every reason to be furious with the Son – and to write him off forever

What does the Father do in the parable?

Does He slam the door?

Does He scowl at the son / dismiss him to work with the servants without speaking to him?

No - - - He welcomes home the repentant sinner!

That is the picture Jesus wants us to see of God the Father

There was a tall blonde haired boy who at the age of eleven had become a pretty good golfer for his age. In fact – he was already competing with boys that were 15 and 16 years old and beating most of them. This young boy had a powerful swing that made him perfect for the game of golf. One day he made a bad shot and broke a golf rule - - - he angrily threw his club as far as he could.

His father – who was playing with him – walked over calmly and picked up the club [the boy was not sure what his dad would do] – the dad brought the club back - handed it to him –

and said: 'Here is your club – the next time you do that will be the last time you set foot on this golf course.'

The boy took his Father's lesson to heart. He learned to control his temper – went on to one of the most storied careers in golf – we know the boy as Jack Nicklaus

The father's actions were measured – his purpose was not to ruin his son - - - but to redeem - - - give him a second chance - - - help him to do better in the future

That's what God does with His creation

He takes no delight in the death of the wicked  
God's heart is in redemption

He is a God of redemption / second chances

He is a God of forgiveness, mercy, and love

God's mercy and forgiveness and love can only be known and appreciated against the backdrop of a fallen and sinful world

It is a rich mercy – overflowing

We can see how the more accurately we see our plight in sin – the more we can appreciate the grace and forgiveness of God

The son in the parable realized he deserved nothing – he was ready to be taken on as a servant - - - but the father overwhelmed him with his rich mercy

God's grace is on display / His character is vindicated thru this amazing work of salvation

Frank Thielman: 'Paul paints a bright portrait of *God's grace* that stands in dramatic contrast to the dark landscape of human sin in 2:1-3. By giving believers life with Christ . . . God has demonstrated the overwhelmingly merciful, loving, and gracious nature of His character . . . He rescued those who are in Christ from the domination of the world, the devil, and the flesh so that He might demonstrate forever the overwhelmingly gracious nature of His character.'

Against the backdrop of sin – God chooses to highlight His grace – to those who will receive it

\*\*\* Luke 7:36-50

In our day this would be the woman whose had 2 abortions - - - chain of 'lovers'

The Pharisees think if Jesus were a proper fellow – He would dismiss her like the plague

But He doesn't – He sees authentic repentance in her heart

He declares the grace of God that has forgiven her

Then He draws this amazing connection – when we begin to process the wonder of grace – we love all the more

## II. *Alive in Christ - vv. 5-6*

Here Paul refers to the great act of regeneration that takes place in salvation

We were dead in our trespasses and sins – something has to happen to make us alive / to make us born again

Jesus told Nicodemus: 'Ye must be born again.'

John Piper: 'No human makes the new birth happen. No preacher and no writer can make it happen. You can't make it happen to yourself. God makes it happen. It happens to us, not by us. But it always happens through the Word of God.'  
[Finally Alive, p. 18]

I Peter 1:23 - 'For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding Word of God.'

We are saved by grace through faith / justified by faith

Rom. 10:17 - 'Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.'

John Piper: 'Spiritual life and faith in Jesus come into being together.'

When a person believes in Christ as Savior – they are born again - a spiritual resurrection

Paul is talking about a spiritual resurrection

MLJ: 'What God has done to us spiritually, says the apostle, is comparable to that which He did to the Lord Jesus Christ in a physical sense when He raised Him from the dead and took Him to Himself to be seated in the heavenly places.'

Salvation is a transfer from death to life

Paul is not talking about our future bodily resurrection

Our physical resurrection occurs – when Christ returns – I Thess. 4:13-17

He is saying – this is something that has happened to you if you are a believer in Jesus Christ

You were dead spiritually - - - now you are alive

Spurgeon: 'The man who begins to live unto God has powers now which he never had before: the power to really pray, the power heartily to praise, the power actually to commune with God.' [MTP 14]

That's a good definition of a Christian: someone who is alive to God

The stirrings of spiritual life – say, 'why am I out here wallowing in the muck and mire of sin?' - - - I will return to my father's house – there is plenty of Bread there – even for the servants

The spiritually dead don't respond to God's Word / God's warnings  
The spiritually alive hear the voice of the Shepherd in Jesus – 'My sheep hear My voice . . .'

The spiritually dead – have no interest in spiritual things [like church / Scripture / prayer]  
The spiritually alive are drawn to them

I remember in my college days – we had a pretty good prayer meeting that met once a week

One girl was coming – we could tell – for all the wrong reasons – [she had grown up in the church – knew the gospel inside and out – but it had not taken hold]

Sure enough – it took but a few months – for her divisiveness and gossipy ways to break up the group

Are you alive to God?  
Do you have an interest in spiritual things?

This is where Paul is speaking of this resurrection power of God to bring this about

The parallel Paul is drawing:  
The raising up of Christ was a display of God's power  
The raising up of the spiritually dead to new life in Christ – is a display of God's power

**Eph. 1:19-20**

This power is at work in us – God's  $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\sigma$  / His energy

Here is this great display of the power of God – to raise up / regenerate a sinner in Christ

Paul refers to this union of the believer with Christ thru faith

We enjoy all that we enjoy by virtue of being in Christ

Klyne Snodgrass: 'In Paul's mind, Christ's death and resurrection are not merely events that produce benefits for believers, they are events in which believers are included.'

Gal. 2:20

In our union with Christ - - - we find that He fulfilled the law for us  
He bore sin's curse for us  
He paid the penalty of our sins in full

He now gives us His righteousness

### III. *The Ages to Come - v. 7*

When we read of the ages to come – it's as though someone has pulled up the shades to give us a glimpse into the big picture of where all this is headed

We can't possibly understand everything that occurs in this world – apart from where God says this is all headed

He is going to take all that is wrong and make it right

That means the resolution / becomes clear in the ages to come

God is vindicating His act of creation – thru the glory that abounds to His name in the great work of salvation – unto the ages

MLJ: 'Salvation vindicates the greatness and character of God in a special way and in a manner which nothing else does.'

We will be displays of God's rich grace in all the ages to come

### Conclusion

John Wesley while attending a meeting where someone was reading Luther's preface to Paul's epistle to the Romans had his ears opened to the gospel for the first time – and came alive to God

'About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart thru faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given

me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' [Wesley and the Men who followed, pp. 8, 9]

When we come alive to God – we trust in Christ for forgiveness of sins – and our sins are taken away

The Father welcomes us back to His presence

We become part of the grand display that brings glory to God thru all eternity