

GOD

God's Great Mercy and Love for Us (Ephesians 2:4)

We have a rich God. This isn't talking about riches in money or in material wealth, but about the richness, or great abundance, of qualities of God that make Him the wonderful God that He is.

We'll first take a look at a few of these qualities that God is rich in, and then we'll focus on one of these, God's mercy. We'll consider what motivates this mercy, and some of the resulting benefits to us, members of the Church of the Body in this Grace Administration.

Romans

2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

This verse mentions the riches of God's goodness (better rendered kindness). It also mentions the riches of His forbearance and longsuffering. Forbearance is to restrain oneself from doing something, like executing judgment, and longsuffering is patience. This verse tells us that God is rich in, or has a great abundance of, kindness, patience, and restraining Himself from executing judgment.

God's richness in these qualities is a very good thing for mankind. Man was spiritually dead, just body and soul, without God and without hope as it says in Ephesians 2:12. Man was no longer righteous before God: Romans 3:10 says: "There is none righteous, no, not one." Even so, because of God's great kindness, patience, and forbearance, He withheld from executing judgment.

Even though man had lost his connection with God and deserved the execution of judgment against him, God made it available for people to become saved, born again by God's spirit when they confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). God didn't have to do it: He did it because of His grace: God's unmerited divine favor.

In fact, grace is another thing that God has riches in:

Ephesians

1:7 In whom (*in the beloved, Jesus Christ, as it says in verse 6*) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness (*remission*) of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

2:7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Twice in the doctrinal portion of the Book of Ephesians we see "the riches of his grace" – it is established: God is rich in, or is abounding in riches of, grace.

God, being the one true God, also has riches in glory, or splendor. God is honorable and worthy of due acknowledgment. Because of God's great glory, He is able to do great things:

Ephesians

3:16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man:

Philippians

4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

So far, we have seen that God has riches in kindness, forbearance, patience, grace, and glory. We've seen that the benefits of these riches to us are great.

But remember, when mankind fell, man deserved to have judgment executed upon him. God's forbearance postponed this judgment, and His grace made something better available, but it was God's mercy that saved us from the deserved judgment being executed at all.

According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, mercy can be defined as compassion to one who is in need or in helpless distress, to one who is in debt without any claim to favorable treatment. Man deserved judgment, but by His mercy God not only postponed but permanently withheld or eliminated the deserved judgment, making it available by His grace for us to be saved.

II Corinthians

1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.

God doesn't only have mercy; He is the Father of mercies. He is the ultimate source, the prime example, of mercy, like Abraham, who because of his great example of believing can be referred to as "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11).

Not only is God merciful, but He is rich in mercy:

Ephesians

2:4 But God, who is (*being*) rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

This verse tells us that God is rich in mercy. But how does this apply to us? We need to look at this verse in its context. We will not only see why God's being rich in mercy is important to us but also what motivates God's mercy.

The first word in verse 4 is "But", so we first need to ask ourselves what "but" refers to. If we were to read the few verses immediately before verse 4, we would see that verses 2 and 3 are really a parenthesis, expanding on what is said in verse 1:

2:1 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

The words “hath he quickened” are in italics – they were added and are not in the original texts, so we can scratch them out. The word “And” is “Even” in the text. So, the verse more accurately reads:

2:1 Even you, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

The word “Even” at the start of the verse refers to something that was said earlier, so we need to consider what was said in Chapter 1. Look at the first part of Chapter 1, verse 19:

1:19a And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward (*the text reads “to you also”*) who believe,

The remainder of verse 19, all the way to the end of Chapter 1, is a parenthesis (a figure of speech) expounding on that power. Even though the first word in verse 19 is “And,” referring to previous verses, we can start with this verse in our quest to understand the full meaning verse 4 of chapter 2.

When there are parentheses, we could read from verse to verse without reading the parentheses in between them to see the flow of what God is saying. Starting with verse 19 of Chapter 1, then, we read:

1:19a And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to you also who believe,
2:1 Even you, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

So, from the context, we see that God made great power available to us. The only problem is, we were dead in trespasses and sins, as it says in Chapter 2, verse 1. Man had lost his spiritual connection, and was without God and without hope: spiritually he was dead. Mankind also deserved to have judgment executed against him, so before he could be saved and given the power mentioned in Chapter 1 verse 19, he needed God’s mercy.

And, as it turns out, God is rich in mercy. The word “in” in verse 4 is the Greek word *en*, which means “to remain within, with the primary idea of rest and continuance”. In other words, God not only has riches of mercy, but he remains rich in mercy. He isn’t merciful one minute then not merciful the next. You can count on His mercy. God’s mercy doesn’t only come into play in making it available for us to avoid deserved judgment in order to get saved, but His mercy applies any time we need it, like when we sin after being born again.

Hebrews

4:16 Let us (*We should*) therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

James

3:17 But the wisdom that is from above (*God’s Word*) is first pure (*holy, uncontaminated*), then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated (*yielding*), full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Not only does God show mercy, but we as believers are also to show mercy to others, especially if we are in positions of leadership. The leadership epistles I and II Timothy and Titus all begin with “Grace, mercy, and peace”.

So, God’s being rich in mercy is a good thing, but we need to go back and start in Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 19 to get the whole context to see what His mercy is good for.

Ephesians

- 1:19a And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to you also who believe,
2:1 Even you, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
2:5 Even when we were dead in sins (*refers back to verse 1*), hath quickened us together (by grace ye are saved;)
2:6 And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* (*in the heavenlies*) in Christ Jesus:

We were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, but God “quickened” us, or made us alive spiritually, and now we are saved and seated together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. And, as verse 4 says, God could do this because He is rich in mercy. We can see this same truth expressed in I Peter chapter 1:

I Peter

- 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which (*who*) according to his (*God’s*) abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope (*living hope*) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from (*from among*) the dead.

Ephesians Chapter 2, verse 4 shows us what motivated God to show His rich mercy and made it available for us to be saved, to be made spiritually alive.

Ephesians

- 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

The word “for” in this verse actually should be read “on account of” or “because of”. God showed His great mercy for us, removing deserved judgment so we could be made alive spiritually, “because of His great love wherewith He loved us”. God’s love motivates His mercy.

The word “love” here is *agapē*, the love of God. It is a spontaneous love irrespective of conditions. In other words, it is God’s unconditional love, no matter what state man is in. God loves man even when he is spiritually dead, without God and without hope.

Romans

- 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:4 says more about this love of God that motivated Him to show mercy: it says “His great love wherewith he loved us”. The word for “loved”, a verb, is *agapaō*, meaning “to regard with favor, to make much of someone”. Even when we were dead in sins, God loved us with His love. And it wasn’t just a little love: it was a great love, love that was abundant, or plenteous.

In order to get an even greater appreciation of what this verse is saying, let’s consider a little more about this love of God and what it means to us. There are numerous verses that show us the greatness of God’s love: here we’ll just look at a few verses in I John:

I John

- 3:1a Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God;
- 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.
- 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.
- 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him.
- 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
- 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

We know from Ephesians 2:4 that God’s mercy was motivated by His great love by which He loved us. But how lasting is God’s love? Can we ever lose His love? We find the answer in Romans, Chapter 8:

Romans

- 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
- 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.
- 8:38 For I am (*have been*) persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
- 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature (*created thing*), shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We should remember and be thankful for the riches of God’s mercy that along with His rich kindness, forbearance, longsuffering, grace, and glory made it available for us to be saved, to be made spiritually alive as members of the Body of Christ. And it all was motivated by the greatness of God’s love for us, which is unchanging and will never end.

- Dr. Rick Batt