

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 2:4-7
Sermon #18
October 2, 1988

"BUT GOD"
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This morning we come to Ephesians chapter two and verse four, and I would like to read down to verse seven which will be our text for the morning.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

It is a very pleasant relief, isn't it, to move out from the first three verses and to move into these next four verses. It is like passing out of darkness into light. In the first three verses of the chapter which we considered together last Lord's day, we see what it means to be in the darkness of sin and to be without the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, as we come to verse 4, as the text clearly indicates with those two wonderful words, "But God," we see that it is God who has made the difference as far as the people of God are concerned.

Perhaps I could go back again this morning in just a word or two to the beginning of the epistle after Paul's initial words of greeting in the first two verses and show how each one of these four sections that we will cover are related to each other. In verses 3 through 14 which was the Apostle Paul's doxology, beginning with those words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" we see in those verses what we all have. Each one of us who knows the Lord has each one of these blessings. You do not have more of them than I do and I do not have more of them than you do. You do not have any more of any single blessing than I do. We each have all of them in equal proportions. We are equally redeemed. We are equally forgiven, and so on down. So, we see all that we have. And, as I mentioned in considering that passage, it is not a complete list by any means when he says that He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings; but he has given us a good sampling there of what we have in Christ.

Then, in the second section, beginning with verse 15 and going down to the end of chapter 1 we see what we all need. When we are saved and blessed with all these blessings God is not through with us. He has only started His gracious work in us. So there are lots of things that we need to know, and that is the burden of the Apostle Paul's prayer. Remember that knowledge always carries with it, as far as the Scriptures are concerned, a corresponding change in our behavior. It is not just something that satisfies our minds, our intellects, but it is transforming in our lives. If I know what the hope of His calling is, then it is going to affect the way I live. If it does not affect the way I live, then I do not really know what the hope of His calling is. So that is what we all need.

Then, in the first three verses of chapter 2 we see what we all were. Nobody is exempt. There is not anybody here this morning who can say, "that does not apply to me." It applies to you. It applies to me. It is descriptive of every person who has ever been born into this world apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is not a good picture, is it? We do not like what we see; but it is good for us to see that because then we understand something of our great need.

Then, when we come to our text for this morning, and I could take it right down through verse ten because that is actually a complete section, we see what we all are now and we see why we are what we are. Verses four through ten really tell us the whole story of salvation. If we get these truths into our hearts, we will never be confused as to what salvation is. I imagine that there would be very few,

if any, of you who would not be able to quote with me at least verses eight and nine, and I know that some of you are trying to memorize the whole epistle of Ephesians as we go through it so maybe you can quote the whole passage from verses four through ten. But, as well known as they are, I am afraid that most of us have been slow in really understanding what Paul was saying in these verses. The words are simple enough; but we are so geared to the idea that we have a part, in fact, that we may initiate this relationship that many of us have entered into with God: He has made the provision, but then He waits for us to do something about it. That is our idea so that we do not really get the full force and the impact of what the Apostle Paul was saying here. So let all of us, especially those of us who know the Lord, be praying that the Lord will make these verses even clearer to us as we go through them. Then, perhaps we will understand even more why as Paul began this marvelous epistle he had to begin with a doxology, with his heart just overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to God because it is God Who has taken action, not only in planning our salvation before the foundation of the world, as we learned in the early verses of chapter one, but He is the One Who has initiated it as far as any one of us is concerned. You see, we were dead in trespasses and sins. We were in bondage to the prince of the power of the air. We were living according to the pattern laid out by the world. We were sinners by nature, sinners by choice, under the judgment of God, and satisfied for it to be that way. Then God began to intervene in our lives. As a result of what He has done, and only because of what He has done, we are here today rejoicing in salvation. This is what the Apostle Paul is certainly telling us in this passage.

So I want you to note very clearly as Paul begins this important section of Scripture that he began with God and he continues with God. If you will look at verses four through seven you will not find one single thing for you to do or for me to do or anything that we have done; but when you get into verse eight it says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith..." He does not say anything about faith in those first verses because he apparently wants us to grasp the idea, the truth, that God is the One Who is working in salvation. If God had not intervened with us, if God had not done what He has done for each one of us individually, we would not be saved this morning--spiritually we would still be back there in verses one, two and three. All is darkness and despair in those verses, isn't it? Man is hopelessly in bondage, as I sought to bring out last week, to the flesh, to the world, and to the devil. He is a sinner, as I mentioned this morning, not only by nature, but he is a sinner by choice. He is under divine judgment. There is nothing that he can do to deliver himself. Unless God has been working in his heart, there is not anything that he would even attempt to do. He is dead, spiritually dead, without any divine life whatsoever, and really not interested in making things right. In fact, man, apart from Christ, is so dead in his sins that he does not even know that he is dead, separated by God from immeasurable distance. That is why those words "but God" are so wonderful. I would recommend that as you read through both the Old and New Testament that you be on the lookout for those passages which begin with these two words because there are lots of them in Scripture. "But God, who is rich in mercy..." They are wonderful words beyond the ability of the most eloquent saint to describe. As long as man is seeking to help himself, or is seeking help from others, he is going to continue on in his doom and in his continued hopelessness. It is only when man comes to realize that his hope is in God that he will have any light as far as the darkness of his sin is concerned.

Now, here we have the greatest of contrasts then: Those two words lead us into the light. This is the transition. But once we see this then we realize that God alone is to be praised for this marvelous work of grace that has been done in our hearts.

Paul says five things about God. I want you to see that all five things are directed toward those to whom he refers as "we" and "us" and, one time at least, he uses the pronoun "ye". This is, in the King James anyway, in contrast with you--"ye" is plural. So let me read the passage again just emphasizing those words:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye [plural] are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come

he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Now, it is reasonable for us to ask the question, To whom is he referring when he uses these words? Who are the "we"? Who are the "us"? Who are the "ye"? that he is talking about. Well, if we go back to the beginning of the epistle, because there is no reason to think that he is talking about anybody else, we will find that he has addressed himself to the saints (verse 1 of chapter 1) which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Paul was writing to the people of God, to those whom he said in verse four of chapter one that they had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. So this leads us to a couple of very important points regarding salvation.

We learn from this statement when we see that it is God Who has done these things that salvation originated with Him, plans were made before the foundation of the world. Plans were made before the foundation of the world. We found that in chapter one, didn't we? They were made even before man had sinned, and that is something for us to contemplate for a good long time. Salvation was actually in the heart of God before there was any creation at all. But, the other important thing is that those words "but God" explain for us the salvation of every person who ever comes to the Lord. That likewise begins with God, as I have tried to stress with you. So the things that I am going to point out to you now are things that apply to the people of God, to us, to those of us who are here who know the Lord, and these are all the works of God. You can pick them out just as easily as I can, but let me mention them.

Notice that it says that He loved us, that He quickened us, that He raised us up, that He made us sit in heavenly places, and the last one has to do with the future (in verse 7): "that in the ages to come he might shew (this word "shew" means to demonstrate or openly manifest) the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

What we know about salvation now makes it very, very wonderful, doesn't it? But, we really are going to see the fullness and the glory and the grandeur of our salvation only after we get to heaven. The Apostle Paul is putting all of this together. He starts with the fact that God loved us and then He quickened us--because we are dead in trespasses and sins, quickened means to make alive--He raised us up, He made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ, and His purpose is that you and I for all eternity are going to continue to experience the exceeding riches of God's grace which was manifested to us first of all when we came to know Jesus Christ as our Saviour. There is not going to be any end to this. The blessings are just going to roll on eternally. Therefore, you and I, if you read through the Book of The Revelation whenever you see the saints in heaven they seem to be praising God continuously. We are instructed to that here on earth. But one reason that we will never come to the end of praising God and worshiping God in heaven is because we will never come to the end of all of His blessings. They are just going to continue to pour out upon us throughout all the ages to come.

Now let's look at each one of these in the time that we have this morning. I hope that as we go, this morning, from this place why these words will be written upon your heart by the Spirit of God in a new way.

First of all, He loved us. He loved us. When you move from verses one, two and three and see what we are, and then you go into verse four and see that He loved us, you know that the only way in which a God like He is could love sinners like we were is because of that little phrase that Paul has inserted there between the statements "but God...for His great love wherewith He loved us." He does not say it that way. He says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." If you and I understand verses one, two and three and realize that that is where God found each one of us, you can see that there is not one single reason when you look at us as to why God should love us. Not one. We are just like everybody else. Everybody that has ever been born into this world, as I have said, belongs there. So if you are looking for the reason for God's love, you are not going to find it in the sinner. God loves us because He loved us. If you will go back to Deuteronomy chapter seven and you find God explaining to the children of Israel why He chose

them and set His love upon them, you will find that the only explanation is that God loved them simply because He loved them. The answer is to be found in the very heart of God.

Now, as you read through these verses, have you noticed in our text those words that really go with love and are kind of bound together in a single package? Mercy is one; obviously you would link the love of God with the mercy of God. Then he mentions in verse five, "by grace ye are saved" so that is another verse that belongs. Then when you get down to the seventh verse, he is talking about the future and he speaks of the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us." His mercy, His love, His grace, His kindness: These are all characteristics of God, aren't they? We speak of them as the attributes of God. If you want to know what God is like, think of these four words and add to them the words goodness and compassion and tenderness and lovingkindness, and words that you find in the Old Testament and the New Testament that are so descriptive of God. But the one that stands above them all is this word "love". The Apostle John tells us twice in his first epistle (1 John 4:8 and 16) that God is love. You remember from your reading of the Old Testament that a statement that you find very similarly many different places in the Old Testament: "Oh give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever" (Psalm 106:1). It seems like whenever the children of Israel were praising God they were praising Him in this way--thanking Him because of what He is. He is good and there is no end to His mercy.

God is righteous also. He is angry with the wicked every day. We have been learning in our Sunday School lessons something about the wrath of God. But the Bible nowhere says, that I know of, that God is angry or that God is wrath. He is judge, to be sure; but the Bible says that He is the personification of love. God exercises judgment because of His love for His people and because of His hatred for sin. So if we want to know what God is we have to know what love is, and if you want to know what love is then study the character of God, study the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, study the character of the Holy Spirit Himself. You would be amazed at what you learn. You see, the reason that God chose us and the reason that He has saved us is because He loves us. As amazing as it might seem, I can tell you on the authority of the Word of God that He has always love us. He did not just start the moment that we were saved or when He began to deal with us.

Do you remember what the Lord said to Jeremiah almost 2600 years ago, and this applied to all of God's people? You remember that the children of Israel were displeasing to God and God had pronounced judgment upon them and they were going to be moved out of the land; but God gave this wonderful word to Jeremiah to pass on to the people in Jeremiah 31:3, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." You see, God's love is so great that you cannot measure its beginning any more than you can measure the beginning of God; and if it is everlasting, it is never going to end. This means then that His love is neverchanging. I wish I could tell you this morning that since I came to know Jesus Christ as my Saviour I wish that I could say that I have never displeased Him, or never grieved Him; but I have, more times than I like to think. Yet I can tell you that through all the times that I have disobeyed or you may have been disobedient to the Lord it has not affected the love of God one iota. God's love never changes. He may have to deal with us in judgment, but His love never changes. His love is always the same. This was the message that He gave to Jeremiah to a rebellious people. If they could only see that regardless of what they had done they had not been able to quench His love for them. This is an amazing thing. How great is the love of "God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us"? I do not have any better answer to that question than what we have in Romans 5:8, "God commendeth (gave proof of) his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, (what happened?) Christ died for us." If He "spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). When we begin to talk about the love of God we just find that language is soon exhausted. The love of God cannot really be described. But we need to meditate upon it and we need to believe it: that right where I am today and right where you are the Lord loves us just as much as He has ever loved us. If you happen to be away from the Lord and you have been displeasing to Him why let this be a truth that will draw your heart back to them because that is the reason the Lord has said this to us in His precious Word.

Secondly, He quickens us. He quickens us. This means, as I have mentioned in reading through, that He gives us life. We are dead in trespasses and sins, we are separated from Him, and He makes us alive. This is what it means when we talk about a Christian having eternal life. When we are dead in sins we are absolutely incapable of doing anything that can please God. Dead people need life before they can do anything, don't they?

I hope you will not get angry with me if I tell you that God had to give you life even before you could believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. I am going to say it whether you get angry with me or not because it is true. Paul does not mention faith until we get down to verse eight, does he? Then he says that it is a part of that whole gift which makes up salvation. But man is so dead in his sins that he cannot believe until he is quickened. If you think about that for just a moment you will realize that that is true. Now, I do not mean that God quickens us one year and saves us the next year. I do not even mean that God quickens us one day and saves us the next day. I think these are run very, very closely together. Perhaps in God's timing not even a second apart; but that quickening has to come. God quickens those whom He intends to save, and, as we will see next week, gives them faith so that they can believe, and all of this is together with our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been quickened together with Him. You and I are really standing on holy ground in dealing with this passage of Scripture, and I would be the first to admit that I cannot adequately express it. But it is wonderful to see these truths of these things that God has done. We are quickened, we are raised, we are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ "that in the ages to come we might experience the exceeding riches of his grace."

So, what does this mean when we think of this: When the Lord gives us eternal life, when he quickens us. I cannot really understand all of the details of it, but it is interesting to see this in the Word of God that we are so united to the Lord Jesus Christ in all of these things that there is a sense, a very real sense, that when I am saved I am quickened and when I am quickened then I am raised up and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ. I want you to think about that statement for just a moment. When you notice that this is all with Christ, that we are quickened together with Him and we are raised up together--this means with Him--and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." You see, in each one of these steps that the Apostle Paul was talking about, if I may describe them that way, he never leaves Christ behind. We are quickened with Christ, we are raised with Christ, we are seated with Christ, and throughout all the ages to come as God continues to shew the exceeding riches of His grace and His kindness it is always going to be through Christ--nothing apart from Christ, everything with Christ.

Let me raise and answer this question, When was Christ actually raised from the dead? Well, we have the record of it, don't we, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When did He come out of the tomb? The same Gospels. When did He ascend back to the Father?

Paul is talking here about the things that took place not too long ago from the standpoint of His writing, but today that goes back 2000 years ago, doesn't it? So the Apostle Paul must be saying that when the Lord Jesus was quickened, in some way I was quickened. When the Lord Jesus was raised, I was raised. When the Lord Jesus ascended, I ascended. When the Lord Jesus was seated at the Father's right hand, I was seated at the Father's right hand. This would apply to each one of you who is here this morning, that this is not only what you and I become conscious of when we are saved, but Jesus Christ died on behalf of his people, didn't He? Consequently, Paul tells the Galatian churches, "I was crucified with Christ." Here he is talking about our resurrection. In Romans chapter six he speaks of our resurrection. We were identified with Him. Jesus Christ died as a substitute. So His death was my death. His death was your death. His resurrection was my resurrection. His resurrection was your resurrection. His ascension was my ascension. His ascension was your ascension. His being seated at the Father's right hand was when I was seated at the Father's right hand. And, in Christ, what does all this do? Well, it goes beyond our ability to understand it, doesn't it? But it certainly means this, that what Christ did when He died on the Cross

He did for those people who are eventually going to be saved throughout all the ages. He died as our substitute so that it is absolutely inconceivable that anybody for whom Christ died and who enters with Christ into His resurrection and His ascension and His present place at the Father--it is inconceivable that they would fail to be saved. When you think of the people who are in hell today, can you say that when He died they died? When He was raised they were raised? When He ascended they ascended? Obviously you cannot. Yet we very blandly and boldly say that when Christ went to the Cross, He went to the Cross with the idea that He was providing salvation for every single person who had ever lived on the face of the earth. You see, Paul is letting us see that when Christ went to the Cross He went to the Cross specifically to accomplish salvation for those who had been given to Him by the Father, chosen from the foundation of the world. How can a person go to hell if Christ has died for His sins and put away those sins by the sacrifice of Himself. He cannot go to hell. God eventually is going to bring Him to know the Saviour. So what we see taking place in the world is simply the outworking of the wonderful purposes of God.

Now, my clock is not slowing up even. Let me get on to these other expressions because I just have time to touch on them this morning, and I think this is very appropriate for us as we come to the Lord's table.

What does it mean that we were raised up together? Paul here distinguishes between the quickening and raising. Well, we were raised with Christ.

You remember that it says, "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). We know that this means that if Jesus Christ came back to the earth again in His glorified body it would be impossible for men to put Him to death. Death has no more dominion over the Lord Jesus Christ. He is beyond all of that. If we are raised from the dead, while we have not yet come to the full realization of this, it means that He has raised us out of death, out of the bondage of death, out of the bondage of sin, out of the power of the world, out of the power of Satan Himself. He has translated us from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. We have been raised, as Paul said in Romans chapter six and verse four to walk in newness of life, so that when He says that He has raised us up together with Christ and that this took place when the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, it takes place as far as our experience is concerned when we come to know the Lord. But being raised means that He lifted us out of all of that terrible bondage of verses one, two and three, and we can never, never go back and have the same relationship to sin again. I can still sin. You can still sin. But by the grace of God we do not have to sin. A person who is without Christ cannot help himself. He is in bondage to sin. We look upon the grave as an enemy, but the Apostle Paul, speaking of that great resurrection of Christ, says, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). The Lord has raised us above these things and someday He is going to show forth in His people the amazing transformation that took place when Christ died on the Cross on behalf of His people.

Look at that next expression, "We are seated with him in the heavenly places." You and I have never actually been to heaven, have we? But we are seated there nevertheless. Someday we are going to be there.

Now, what does the ascension of the Lord Jesus mean? Well, He ascended back to the Father and He was seated at the Father's right hand. Do you know what this means? I am sure that most of you do. This means that He was received back into the Father and seated at the Father's right hand, indicating that the Father was perfectly satisfied with what His Son had done and He was received back into heaven under the full favor of the Father. If He had failed to accomplish His work--this is just a big if and I am just saying this to make a point--If for some reason He had not put away our sin He would not have been received back to the Father. The resurrection and the ascension of Christ, when we understand it, are a testimony that God has given to us that Christ did accomplish that work. He finished it. He satisfied God. As far as God is concerned nothing remains that needs to be done for the salvation of those for whom our Lord Jesus Christ died. So what does this mean

if I am seated with Him and if you are seated with Him? It means that God is just as satisfied about our salvation as He is satisfied with Jesus Christ Himself. I would not dare say that if that were not taught in the Word of God. Are you worrying lest there might be something that needs to be done, something that needs to be added, something that we must do to complete the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me tell you that if you understand that you are seated with Christ in heavenly places you know that there is absolutely nothing that needs to be done. Christ has accomplished it all and just as He sits at the Father's right hand with the Father's full acceptance and pleasure upon Him, you and I have that same place before God. An amazing and wonderful truth, isn't it?

One more thing: "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." You see, God is not only so rich in mercy (verse 4) that His mercy is never going to be exhausted; but His grace is exceedingly rich--"the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." I do not know what this is going to mean. This goes beyond even what is revealed for us in Scripture, but I can tell you and you can see it for yourself here that the best is yet to come. It is wonderful to be a Christian, isn't it? It is wonderful to know the Lord Jesus. I would not want to spend a moment without Him. It is wonderful to be able to fellowship with Him. It is wonderful to be able to trust Him to guide. It is wonderful to know that He is going to restrain us and He is going to keep us and that He is working in our hearts. Being a Christian is just wonderful beyond what we can possibly explain to anybody else. But, we have not seen anything yet, really. There is more to come: Blessings that you and I have never been able to experience here on earth. Spiritually we are quickened, raised, seated at His right hand; but the day is coming when we will be there with our glorified bodies just like He is. Then, what will it be like then? So wonderful that words, even the words of Scripture, cannot describe it for us. Eternity will be one long existence of continuing to enjoy the blessings of God. Then we will make heaven ring, won't we, with the saints of all ages praising God for all that He has done for us in Jesus Christ. If we are inclined to forget about the Lord Jesus Christ here occasionally, we will never forget Him when we stand in the presence of God.

Robert Murray McCheyne was a young Scotch preacher who died when he was 29 or 30 years of age, but his writings and his life still have an impact upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He expressed in verse what I have been trying to say to you this morning and what I believe Paul was saying here. Let me read these to you as we close this morning.

When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not til then, how much I owe.

When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see thee as thou art,
Love thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not til then, how much I owe.

Then listen to this wonderful word. The church has forgotten this today:

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,

By my love, how much I owe.

We have a debt of love, don't we, that we can never repay; but the Lord is concerned about one thing as far as our lives are concerned. That is that we love Him with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our strength, with all of our mind, and that we manifest our love to Him by our willing obedience to do His will and to live for His glory. May God do that work in each one of our hearts and especially renew that as we come to the Lord's table this morning.

Shall we pray.

Father,

I have been talking about things this morning that I do not fully understand, but I am thankful that we do not have to be able to explain them in detail to be able to enjoy them to the full. But, Lord, as we turn from this passage, while we are thankful that we have been quickened, we are thankful that we have been raised, we are thankful that we are seated in heavenly places if we know Christ as our Saviour, thankful that we are going to be a part of that great company of people who will experience your blessings for all eternity, yet, Father, we are most thankful of all that you have told us in Your Word that we would not have any of this if it were not for our dear Saviour and Friend, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is with Him that we have been quickened. It is with Him that we have been raised. It is with Him that we have been seated. It is with Him that we have our acceptance with Thee. All of the blessings that we experience now and throughout all eternity, we know, dear Father, come to us because of Him and through Him. Oh, help us to love Him more and help us to trust Him more. Help us to glorify Him with lives obedient to Your precious Word. Be with us as we gather at the Lord's table and may Your blessing be upon us. In Jesus' name, Amen.