

But God...

After describing the horrible condition of mankind without Christ, Ephesians 2:4, 5 then declares, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*”

It is a characteristic you will find throughout Scripture that when man is corrupt, when situations are hopeless, when people disappoint you or prove to be inadequate, when you fall flat on your face, there is always the divine injunction: ***But God...*** Look for it as you read and meditate upon His Word. The God of the Bible—the One True God— is always *more* than adequate. He always comes through at just the right moment.

In commenting on “The Character of God’s Grace,” James Smith in Volume IV of *Handfuls on Purpose*, writes, “He is gracious, and His grace contains *exceeding riches*. He is rich in power and in wisdom, but He is *exceeding* rich in grace, so that He will *abundantly* pardon. All the needs of this great perishing world could not exhaust the riches of His grace. ‘Where sin abounded, grace did *much more* abound.’” (page 273).

It is an unmistakable characteristic of God that He would rather forgive than punish, which is not to suggest that He never punishes the evil of evil men for He does. Everyone of His attributes are eternal and infinite, however,

God *Favors* His grace and mercy

To All Mankind

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works (Psalm 145:8, 9). Jesus emphasized the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “*He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45).

To the Unbelieving World

Our God is first and foremost a God of mercy and grace, a God of love, offering forgiveness and restoration for all who will receive it.

James 2:13 makes this astounding observation: *Mercy triumphs over judgment*. The context of this statement is that of judgment. It points out that even if we are able to “*keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point,*” we are guilty of all (vs. 10). And since we are guilty of breaking the entire Mosaic Law through the breaking of one of its commands, we stand guilty and are worthy of God’s just judgement. Then this arresting statement that “*mercy triumphs over judgment.*” God, it seems, would rather be merciful than to exercise His judgment. What a Savior! What good news to the unbelieving world! What comfort to the down trodden child of

God!

God had sent Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh. Jonah did not want those wicked people to be brought to God, so he fled in the opposite direction away from Nineveh. Once God got his attention (by having him swallowed by the great fish and “vomited onto dry land”)— he did go to the city and preached God’s message. The result was that “*the people of Nineveh believed God...*” (3:5). We now pick up the story in 4:1, 2: *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly [that Nineveh came to the Lord], and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD and said, “Ah, LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my country? Therefore I fled to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”*

The New Testament parallel to Jonah is seen in such passages as Ephesians 2:8, 9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Romans 5:6, 8 is another excellent example of God’s great love coming to the rescue of fallen man. *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly...But God demonstrates His own love toward us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*

To His Own People

Nehemiah gives this testimony concerning Israel’s attitude when God had commanded them to go into the land of Canaan and to “possess” it. *They refused to obey and they were not minded of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage [in Egypt]. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them (Nehemiah 9:17).*

Psalms 103:8, 10–14 also reveals the tender love of God toward His own. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy...He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.* Note the phrase in verse eight that the Lord is “abounding in mercy.” He’s not just merciful; He *abounds* in it toward you, if you know Him!

This same truth was earlier revealed when God was about to make new tablets of the Law and to renew His covenant with Moses. *And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth...” (Exodus 34:6).* Thank God it is so.

To Israel in the Last Days

We are admonished in Psalm 122:6 to “*pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you.*” God is not finished with Israel. Though her worst days are ahead, so are her best days. After saying that He would drive them among the nations—which has happened—God then promises the following: *But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress [tribulation] and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers when He swore to them* (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

To You as a Believer in Christ

Isaiah 30:18 is speaking directly to and about Israel, but we may apply it to believers today because the New Testament confirms that God has a gracious purpose for each of His children now. *Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy on you...blessed are all those who wait for Him.* God is training and molding you into what He purposes for you. At times the training may not be pleasant, but as you wait upon Him you will see just how gracious He is. Hebrews 12:11 adds, *Now no chastening [training] seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* The **nevertheless afterward** in the above verse and **But God...** are one and the same—God bringing about what He desires—in *His time and in His way.* Count on it and your your walk with Him be greatly enriched .

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