

God's Mercy Is As Broad As His Love But Not As Wide As His Providence

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us. Eph 2:4

It is the belief of most modern Christians that God's mercy is indeed as broad as his love, but that his love and providence reach out to everyone. Since God loves all, he has mercy on all and offers salvation to all, if only they would come. This posits a redundant god in the matter of salvation, a god who is helpless to determine who will come into his Kingdom; a god who has no say on which humans enter into his family. It also teaches that people who lead vile and wicked lives, people who unremorsefully perpetrate inhuman crimes and abuses upon others, are under God's love and care and can, at any moment, simply turn and make good that love and mercy by their own decision.

Sadly, many supposed Calvinists today believe that God loves everyone without distinction, even though they maintain (at the same time) that Christ only died for the elect.¹ Thus they also teach that God's mercy and love are as wide as God's providence.

The position of godly teachers throughout history did not agree with this. While they maintained that all men are evil and any man can come to Christ at any time if God gives grace to believe, people who are wicked are under judgment, not mercy. The end of sin is death not life. The appropriate message for a violent abuser of others is not *'God loves you and you can just turn and be saved immediately since God is merciful also.'* The message is, *'Your crimes are evil and are worthy of condemnation. God hates sin and will judge such crimes and sentence you to eternal punishment if you do not repent, turn towards God and believe in his Saviour. An appropriate proof of such a change in your life is to make recompense to those you have wronged.'*²

A key part of the theology of these godly men was the insistence that God is sovereign in salvation. He alone determines who will be in the Kingdom because he chooses who will receive grace to believe and repent. There is nothing haphazard about the population of heaven, it is populated with chosen people. There is nothing arbitrary in who is saved and who is condemned. Only those God loved from eternity know mercy.

To evaluate the differences between historic Calvinism and modern Evangelicalism in these matters, we will look at each of these attributes in turn and see how they apply to salvation.

¹ This is really the error of Amyraldism, not Biblical Calvinism.

² Jn 3:36; Ps 5:5-6; Acts 3:19, 17:30; Matt 10:28, 18:9; Lk 19:8-9.

The Mercy of God

God's mercy is broad, reaches to the heavens and endures forever,³ but it never obliterates the need for justice, wrath and condemnation. In the context of the giving of the law, God said:

And the LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.'

Ex 34:6-7

Here we see mercy for some, a mercy that involves the forgiveness of iniquity, but condemnation for others. There is not mercy automatically for all. This is closely allied to the concept of God's people. The people God redeemed from Egypt knew mercy and were even led forth by God's mercy:

You in your mercy have led forth the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided *them* in your strength to your holy habitation. Ex 15:13

God's mercy was specifically for God's people; the rest of the then world would know only fear:

The people will hear *and* be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab. Trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them. Ex 15:14-16

In the Psalms, we see that God shows mercy to: his anointed people [Ps 18:50], to those who fear and obey him [Ps 33:18, 103:11], to those who call upon him [Ps 86:5] and to his covenant people [Ps 98:3, 102:13]. Indeed, God states that he does not show mercy to certain people [Isa 27:11; Hos 2:4].

Thus we see that mercy is tied to covenant, to God's people, to election. God chooses a people, establishes a bond of friendship with them and deems to give these people mercy, even though they are sinful and do not deserve it. People outside this covenant know no mercy. If only Israel knew salvation under the old covenant,⁴ where was the mercy to Gentile nations?

God's mercy is only towards those he loves, those he chooses:

God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us. Eph 2:4

I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. Rm 9:15

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills. Rm 9:18

The Love of God⁵

God does not love everyone! Just a second's clear thought shows this to be true if one has a proper understanding of God's perfections. God only does things fully and perfectly, and what he does is from eternity to eternity. God never decrees anything imperfectly or

³ Ps 36:5, 136:1.

⁴ Deut 7:6, 10:15; Jn 4:22; plus to those proselytes who joined themselves to Israel.

⁵ This section is excerpted from my paper, *Unpopular Truths*.

temporarily. What is decreed is eternal, full and perfect: **Whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it, (Eccles 3:14).**

If God declares that someone is loved they were loved from eternity and they are loved fully into eternity future for evermore. Further God only loves anything in this creation on the basis of his Son. The Father loves the Son, all else in this world is consigned to destruction. Those who are loved by God are loved because they are found in Christ. The essence of salvation, actually, is being found in Christ - just as Noah's family was saved inside the ark from a world that was judged. [This is why there is a linguistic connection between the pitch that covered the ark and the propitiation of Christ's atonement.]

Those that are sentenced to hell were never loved by God; how could they be? If God loved them on earth, then his love was taken away from them in hell, or God loves people in hell. The latter thought is preposterous as hell is the place of God's judgment and wrath. Therefore, God either never loved these or he stopped loving them. But God cannot cease loving someone he has set his love upon, or his love would be imperfect and fallible; his decree would be faulty – God would stop being God.

Perhaps God loves wicked people with a lesser sort of love? Well this is never even hinted at in the Bible, in any way. God either loves or he doesn't. How can God display a strong love to some and a weaker love to others? God only does things fully and perfectly, or he isn't God. Since he is perfect, God only does things perfectly; there is no half measure in God's love.

Thankfully, we do not need metaphysical arguments since the matter is settled plainly. God hates certain people and this is mentioned very many times indeed in the Bible. No one can say God loves everyone since the Bible shows that he hates some.⁶ Neither can we use sophistry to make the word 'hate' mean 'to love less'; this is just a falsity. The word means what it says and some of the original words are the same word as the hate that leads to murder.

Neither is there any place at all where scripture states that God loves everyone; not one. The NIV uses 'love' in Ps 145:13, but the word does not appear in the majority of Masoretic texts. It is a mistranslation. The word 'compassion' is used for all in Ps 145:9, but this is not love, it is a reference to God's providence which provides good (rain, sun, seasons) to everyone. Even this Psalm reveals a distinction between the elect and the reprobate⁷ (see v18-20). Jn 3:16 teaches that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to save the elect. If 'world' here meant everyone, then it means the same in v17 and this would then teach universalism - everyone saved and no hell for men. 'World' here cannot mean everyone or there is no Gospel. The word 'world' is also often used in a limited sense, such as in Jn 12:19. Neither do the texts using the word 'all' mean everyone, such as 1 Tim 2:4. 'All' is frequently limited in scope throughout scripture (like 'world') and often only means a relatively small number (such as Jn 3:26, 8:2). Again, if 'all' means everyone here then we have universalism again.

The simple truth is that of election, often itself unpalatable. After man's fall he forfeited all hope and was judicially worthy of nothing but wrath. Knowing the inevitability of the fall, and using it for his own purposes, God chose a portion of mankind to be saved to demonstrate his grace and mercy. Upon these he set his love from eternity and placed

⁶ For instance: Lev 20:23, 26:30; Ps 5:5, 11:5, 53:5; Prov 16:16-19; Zech 11:8; Mal 1:3; Rm 9:13.

⁷ 'Reprobate' is a Biblical term meaning 'rejected' that is used theologically to identify the non-elect. It is translated as 'reprobate' by the KJV but as 'rejected', 'disqualified' or 'disapproved' by other versions. See 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 1:16.

them in Christ⁸. Those who were not chosen can only receive God's hate, even though God is patient with their sins and providentially provides for their good day by day – for the elect's sake.

Throughout scripture one sees a distinction between the wicked and the good, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light; the book of Psalms reveals this very clearly. This is the dichotomy between the elect and the reprobate - those whose sins destine them to condemnation. For this reason wrath hangs over most men (Jn 3:36). Those who have God's wrath on them are the ones that God hates. Only the elect in Christ are loved.

Thus God's love is also tied to his election; God loves his covenant people and no one else.

The Providence of God

The providence of God is the divine provision for the continuance of humanity and creation so that his eternal decree can be fulfilled. It secures the preservation of the world of men during the working out of God's plan of salvation. Without God's restraint, the wicked would destroy the world and wipe out the church. Without God's provision and supervision of sun, rain, tides, wind and seasons, there would be no food or water.

God's purpose of election requires that the world continues as it always has until the last member of the elect has been born and subsequently saved. After that time there is no need for providence, but only for judgment and condemnation. The patience of God in keeping the world going is specifically for the elect, as Peter says:

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.⁹ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 2 Pt 3:9-10

Thus God will continue to provide for all mankind until the end, when judgment falls after the return of Christ the Lord. Until that time, though there may be localised and specific temporal judgments against nations that result in catastrophes such as hurricanes, pestilence, floods, famines, earthquakes and tsunamis, God ensures that mankind survives.

Thus God is rich in compassion, patience and long-suffering towards those who are evil and deserve nothing but wrath. Also the elect share in the benefits of this and the difficulties. The elect are not spared the natural disasters that befall mankind.

Thus God's providence is not like his mercy and love, it is universal and applies indiscriminately to all mankind and the natural order.

To summarise the scope of God's providence note:

God controls the universe in general

Ps 103:19; Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11

⁸ Eph 1:4-5: He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

⁹ That this refers to the elect is clear from Peter's writings. Peter has no truck with universalism but teaches that the wicked reprobate are: **made to be caught and destroyed ... and will utterly perish in their own corruption (1 Pt 2:12) for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (2 Pt 2:17)**. Peter thus taught double predestination, the elect are loved but the reprobate are reserved for condemnation.

God controls the world and animals in particular
 Job 37:5, 10; Ps 104:14, 21, 28, 135:6; Matt 6:26, 10:29

God controls the seasons
 Dan 2:21; Acts 14:17

God provides food
 Ps 104:14 104:21; Matt 6:26; Lk 1:53

God is king of the earth
 Ps 47:7

God controls the nations and their rulers
 Job 12:23; Ps 22:28, 66:7; Dan 2:21; Acts 4:27-28, 17:26

God controls all aspects of the life of man
 1 Sam 16:1; Ps 75:6-7, 139:16; Isa 45:5; Lk 1:52; Gal 1:15-16

God controls all events
 Prov 16:33; Matt 10:30

God preserves certain men and nations
 Gen 45:5, 50:20; Ex 12:36

God protects the righteous
 Ps 4:8, 5:12, 63:8, 121:3; Rm 8:28

God supplies the needs of his people
 Gen 22:8, 14; Deut 8:3; Phil 4:19

God raises some men up for his purposes
 Ps 18:35; Acts 9:17

God hardens some men and nations and judges them
 Ex 14:17; 2 Sam 24:1; Dan 4:25

God controls life and death
 I Sam 2:6; Matt 10:29-30

God controls men's actions and forms their hearts
 2 Sam 16:10; Ps 33:15; Prov 16:9, 19:21

The sinfulness of man is permitted and controlled by God for his purposes
 Ps 76:10

Conclusion

Thus we can state that God's mercy is only on those he loves, and these are the elect in Christ. The atonement is only provided for these and only these know God's filial love. God's mercy and love are not universal but particular to a few.

For many are called, but few chosen. Matt 20:16, 22:14

On the other hand God's providential care is universal; indeed it is not only centred upon the earth but includes the control of the whole universe according to God's plan. In order to secure the birth and the livelihood of the elect, so that they can mature and hear the Gospel, God preserves the world and controls it according to his purposes. The wicked benefit from the provision of seasons, rain, natural resources and sunshine but the providence is for the elect.

Thus God's love is not universal; God's mercy is not universal; but God's care for the world in general is universal, yet its central purpose is for the elect. The greater purpose over all these things is the glory of God in Christ.

For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen. Rm 11:36

Problem passages to consider

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lords is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made. Ps 145:13 (NIV)

This is a seemingly insurmountable difficulty; except that the second sentence is not in Scripture!

The NIV has added a whole sentence that is not in the best manuscripts. Not only that, it adds words that are contrary to other Scriptures. It says that God is 'loving' to all he has made, when Scripture actually says that God hates sinners, the wicked, the blasphemous etc. (Ps 5:4, 6, 11:5 etc.).

Here are other versions

KJV: Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations.

ASV: Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations.

NAS: Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Thy dominion *endures* throughout all generations.

NAB: Psalm 145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.

NKJ: Psalm 145:13 Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.

Darby: Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and thy dominion is throughout all generations.

Young's Literal Translation: Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom {is} a kingdom of all ages, And Thy dominion {is} in all generations.

The reason for this is that the Arminian translators on the NIV translation committee chose to add words that favour their heresy and went against good translation protocols. Only one Masoretic manuscript has these lines; the vast majority do not.

The NIV of verse 17 says,

The LORD *is* righteous in all His ways, and loving towards all he has made.

While the NKJV (and others) says,
The LORD /srighteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works.

The word 'gracious' is *chaciyd* meaning: faithful, kind, godly, holy one, saint, pious. Therefore good translations use either 'holy', 'kind', 'gracious', 'righteous' and not one other uses 'loving' because the Hebrew word for 'love' is not used.

These two examples alone show that the NIV is completely untrustworthy for any true believer.

So, there is no difficulty in this psalm in connection with my thesis in this paper.

[Adapted from the paper 'Advice for novices'.]

For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Rm 11:32

The world 'all' is very frequently limited in scope. It has a wide variety of uses and applications and very often only means a few, all in a certain group but which constitutes a small proportion of a greater group.

Paul is clearly talking about the elect here. It cannot mean all men since that would imply universalism, a heretical doctrine opposed to Paul's teaching everywhere. It also cannot mean all Jews since experience shows us that very many Jews die in their sins and Jesus told many Pharisees that they would go to hell. Indeed, it was to Jews that he said, 'few are chosen'; thus the majority of Jews would not be saved.

When he says that 'all Israel will be saved' he means all those who are true Israelites. By his definition that is all those who have faith because they are elect (Rm 2:28-29, 9:6-8); all those who are truly part of Abraham, the father of the faithful (Gal 3:7-9). Nathaniel was an 'Israelite indeed', rather than an unbelieving Jew (Jn 1:47).

Paul also explains in this context that election is the basis of being saved,
Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. Rm 11:27-31

Jews are naturally enemies of the Gospel (Acts 13:45; Rm 11:28; 1 Thess 2:15-16); but those who are elect are loved and this is due to the gift and calling of God. They are saved in the same way that Gentiles are saved and receive mercy by being called and chosen. The Gospel saves Jews and Gentiles in the same way – according to God's gift and choosing.

'Mercy on all' means that only the elect receive mercy and all the elect will certainly receive mercy.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Gal 6:16

'And' here has the meaning of 'even'. Paul is writing to Gentiles (in fact Celts) and proves to them that following Judaism is wrong. After demonstrating that all the teaching of the Judaisers is heretical, he closes his letter by showing that only a new creation

(regeneration) counts; he then blesses those who walk as born again people, even the Israel of God i.e. the spiritual nation separated to God. If he meant national Israel it would deny all his previous teaching and would be starting a new discussion, but his letter ends two verses later. [Excerpted from my paper '*Does God love Jews especially?*']

For the many other universalistic texts, see my paper, 'An Analysis Of The Key Disputed Universalistic Texts'.

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