

Rooted in Grace: Jesus Christ with Me
Romans 5:1-11
Sunday, August 17, 2025

When I was in college, I was a jerk. I had a girlfriend through most of my college experience. And, looking back on the experience, I realize I was a real jerk. My friends used some more colorful terms, but I'll stick with jerk. The way it would work is, I would inevitably do something selfish or stupid and we would break up. But eventually she would relent and take me back. Until she didn't. She eventually just decided she had had enough. I tried and tried to weasel my way back into her good graces, but without success. The relationship was gone and it wasn't going to come back.

This is the second week in our sermon series: Rooted in Grace. As I said last week, when we talk about God's grace, we're talking about God's love in action. Remember, God is love and so we were created to live in love with God, and with one another. And, as we also talked about last week, God's gracious action in our lives takes several forms. So, last week, we talked about Prevenient Grace, the many ways that God pulls us and pushes us and woos us towards God. The way God makes God's love for us apparent. The way God shows us His desire for a relationship with us. And the way God helps us to understand that WE are the reason the relationship isn't happening; it is our selfishness, our jerkiness, our sin that's getting in the way.

And there's nothing WE can do about it. We're stuck in our jerkiness. Paul says as much a little earlier in this letter, chapter 3, verses 10-12: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become

worthless; no one does good” Without God’s help, we are utterly helpless to reconcile with God.

As some of y’all know, I really like ice cream. And so, I envision our situation as like being on one side of a huge chasm. On the other side of the chasm is one ice cream shop after another, just giving away for free all the best kinds of ice cream. But, because of the huge divide, there is no way I can get to the other side.

It’s also kind of like the situation between myself and my former girlfriend. Complete alienation, and there’s nothing we can do about it.

Although, there *is* one *big* difference. When my college relationship was over, it was over. My former girlfriend was done with me and she wasn’t going to have me back. But God is NEVER done with us. God NEVER stops loving us.

So, we get that prevenient grace. God seeking to woo us back. God’s rescue operation for humanity as a whole, and for each of us individually. By ourselves, we can’t get back to God, but God CAN come down to us.

And, in Jesus, He did. That’s what today’s scripture is about. In verse 8, Paul says, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” And, as a result, as Paul says in v. 11, through Jesus—his life, death, and resurrection—we are able to be reconciled with God. The relationship that we threw away by being jerks, the relationship for which we were created—a life lived in God’s divine love—is once again possible.

Now, in today's scripture, Paul talks about this in terms of reconciliation. He also talks about it in terms of "justification." It's the same thing. It's being made right with God. Our relationship with God is restored.

Now, some people have a little difficulty with the word "justification." It's not as intuitive as "reconciliation". Here's the way of thinking about it that might help.

When I was in High School, I took a typing class. I know I'm dating myself. I'm not sure why I did it, maybe I thought I'd grow up to be a writer. And when I say "typing," I mean we used actual typewriters. And one of the first things we learned in that typing class was justification. We would set our little lever up on the left of the barrel of the typewriter and whenever we hit the return key (same as the "enter" key on our keyboards today), the carriage would go back to that spot, so all the text would line up on the left side of the paper. That was called left justification. The text all lined up on the left.

Now, of course, all you've got to do on your computer word processor is hit a button and it can take the text you've already typed and justify it on the left, justify it on the right, or even center each line on the page.

So, think of your life as a bunch of random words and sentences scattered all over a page. It's a big mess. But through Jesus, God has pushed the justify button. Now it's all straightened out. Now, all the mess is gone. All the jerky stuff you've done, it's as if it never existed. It's been washed away.

You are justified. Another way of thinking about it, it's "just as if" you'd never sinned.

And, according to Paul in today's scripture, that justification, that reconciliation, happens through a thing called faith.

Now, we know all about faith, right? We're Americans, so we're taught to have faith in ourselves; our ability to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We've got faith that we can handle anything the world throws at us.

But, as we've already discussed, that kind of faith isn't going to get us right with God because there's nothing WE can do to make reconciliation with God happen.

Now, as we've already discussed, God's Prevenient Grace is designed to show us that God loves us, that God wants a relationship with us, and that even though we can't do anything to make ourselves right with God, God's love is so deep and so wide that God reached down to us and has made reconciliation and justification possible through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus.

And it's when we achieve that realization that we're ready for faith. Faith in the sense that Paul is talking about here, is on the one hand, belief in what I just said: Knowing that God loves you. Knowing that God wants a relationship with you. But also knowing that you have been a jerk and rejected that relationship. And finally, it's knowing that despite what you've done, God has gone ahead and made that relationship possible for you once again through Jesus. Faith is accepting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the means through which your sins have been forgiven and you have been saved.

Now, a lot of people who claim to be followers of Jesus stop right there. But I'm here to tell you that just knowing stuff up here [head] isn't what Paul is talking about in this passage or

in any of his writings. The kind of faith Paul is talking about isn't just about knowing and agreeing with a set of facts. It is also, and primarily, about trust. It is about trusting that Jesus really is who he says he is; he really is THE way, and the truth, and the life.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed that God created each of us with free will. Through God's Prevenient Grace, we are given the opportunity to choose to trust Jesus with our salvation; to not just acknowledge certain facts about Jesus, but to trust him ... with our minds, with our bodies, with our wills, with our very selves. To give ourselves to him. To *really* follow him.

And, when we do that, as Paul says, we are reconciled. We are brought into right relationship with God. Through God's Justifying Grace, our slate is wiped clean. It's as if all our sins and all our jerkiness never happened. We are forgiven.

But our reconciliation with God goes beyond just our forgiveness, as important as that is. Paul says that "God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Our reconciliation isn't just God pushing the justification button to fix the things we've already done.

It is also, and I would say primarily, God giving us what Jesus in John's Gospel calls new life, eternal life. It is God giving us the Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of what we'll talk about next Sunday: sanctification: the process of being transformed from what we used to be before we were reconciled with God, into the people God created us to be.

Here's another image I really like. Think of your life in God as a house. Prevenient grace prepares you to enter the house. It's like the porch. With Justifying grace, you walk through the

door, into the house, into your life with God. But at that point, you've still got a whole house to explore. And that's what we're going to talk about next week.