

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Romans 5:1-11. English Standard Version

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Sanctification.

The word theology, in a very general sense, refers to the study of religious belief.

In Christianity, we often refer to different perspectives on Christian theology, and

we give them different names. There is something called “Wesleyan-Holiness”

theology, and while it was not invented by John Wesley, the founder of

Methodism, it is based on his teachings and writings. Essentially, it focuses on the

relationships between grace, faith, and holiness. Grace is an unearned gift from

God, what Wesley refers to as God's unearned favor. God's grace acts on us, drawing us closer to God, helping us have faith, even before we are consciously thinking about God being in our lives. Then, through faith, we are justified, i.e., we become righteous in the eyes of God. We are no longer doomed from a moral perspective. The critical point is that we are saved through faith, not by our acts. Yes, our acts are a demonstration of the depth, the validity of our faith. But faith, brought to us through grace, is what matters. Then, after we have faith, we have the opportunity to incrementally become Christlike, obtaining a state of holiness. Wesley's theology in a nutshell is that grace leads to faith, which leads to holiness.

But there is only one basic Christian theology; there are simply different ways of looking at it, and Wesley's is one that focuses heavily on grace. There's another word that is often confused with "theology". It's "doctrine". Theology is abstract. Doctrine is practical. Theology tells us what Christianity is about from an academic perspective, in terms of our basic beliefs. Doctrine, on the other hand, dictates the way we carry out the theology by which we guide our lives. And Romans, this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome, is considered the finest overview of Christian doctrine. It is the longest letter of Paul's that has survived. It had a great impact on the faith of John Wesley, in particular. This letter played a large role in him developing true, deep, and genuine faith.

Now, here's the reason I wanted to talk about this on Good Friday: another word for holiness, perhaps a better word, is sanctification. The word holiness sounds ethereal, unreal. But sanctification suggests that we are working to cleanse ourselves of sin and of evil intentions. But how do we get to this path that the Christian follows, the path toward sanctification? Let's look at our Bible passage today. It's a classic Good Friday passage. Near the beginning, we find this line: *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* This is a reference to Jesus Christ, saying that through Jesus, we have gained access to forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. This word "access" is an interesting way to translate the original Greek word. The issue is that we don't have a good word to use for this Greek word, which is προσαγωγή (pronounced pros-ä-gō-gā'). It does mean access. But in Jesus' time, this Greek word was used to describe the gift of allowing someone to approach a king. It's like being invited to lunch by the president. It's a grand form of access. That's what Jesus gives us.

Our passage goes on to explain the gift that Jesus has given us in more detail. It tells us about grace and what it does for us. More precisely it says that while humans might be willing to come to the aid of someone who is obviously a deeply good person or who has done something for them, God is willing to come

to our aid even when we are at odds with God, not living by God's laws, living in sinful ways. That's what grace is all about – God loving us, embracing us, drawing us toward faith and the forgiveness and justification that it brings. And it was by the sacrifice of God's son, Jesus, that we have ultimately been reconciled with God. On Good Friday, we celebrate this sacrifice, which opens the door to reconciliation with God, and puts us on the path toward sanctification. Good Friday marks the beginning of the Christian journey.

But for most of us, we don't live our lives worrying about whether we are justified in God's eyes as faithful people who have embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ. We don't get up each morning to pursue the path of sanctification, of becoming holier each day. But it might be that we should be doing this. It might make us focus harder on what truly brings us happiness.

Let me finish with this: I went to the seminary at the Iliff School of Theology, which, while it is traditionally a Methodist Seminary, is famous for being radically liberal. Not all the students there are studying for seminary degrees, and many have no intention of working in organized religion. One day, after class, there was a small group of us standing around, and one of them, who was not an active Christian, asked me about this sanctification stuff, this holiness

thing that John Wesley is so famous for. What was it all about? I then gave them essentially the same overview I just gave you. One of them started snickering and a couple of others laughed. They said it sounded like typical Christian elitism, where we somehow think that we are above other people, that we can become God-like. It makes sense, they said, that some 1700s Christian leader would have come up with this worldview that transforms European people into gods. I tried to argue that working to become more like Jesus is very different than trying to be God-like, but I'll admit that I didn't get very far. It was only later that I realized that I should have said this: the point is that we want to be more like a God who came to earth as a relatively poor person. Our Bible passage today is from the Standard English Version. Here's the very last part of it, from the New Living Translation: *For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.* ¹¹ *So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.* That says it all – Jesus Christ walked among us and died as a desperate human, so that we could learn to be modest people who treat other people the way Jesus treated us. Through the life and death of Jesus, God made one thing clear: God is willing to be our friend and teach us how to be humans - and thereby connect with God as humans.