**The Book of Romans**

***Kingdom Relationships Learning to Give Grace to Others***

“Live in harmony with one another. . .if your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat. . .” Romans 12:16, 20

A key element in Romans is justification by faith, and a key element in justification by faith is forgiveness. “Forgiven” is the sweetest word a sinner can hear, whether spoken by God, or by other sinners. With forgiveness, fallen people can flourish, without it, no relationship can stand. Let’s see how Jesus says this works. . .

***The Premise: Grace is a way of life in God’s Kingdom.*** Matthew 18:1-14

*“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”*

 *-- Matthew 18:1*

Jesus begins talking about that in verse 15, but the context for forgiveness is the Kingdom and relationships in the church (vv. 16, 17). First, Jesus warns the disciples that the Kingdom is not about human power grabs, but on the contrary, taking care of the “little ones” (refer-ring to all believers, those who have humbled themselves as children so as to become residents of the Kingdom).

The follow up lessons are two: first, don’t be the cause of any of these Kingdom Fellow-Citizens to stumble (vv. 5-9), and second, if one of them wanders away, go find and retrieve him at any cost (vv. 10-14).

So, Jesus lays the groundwork and foundation of the Kingdom entirely in grace, not law (being perfect) or merit (earning approval): the grace of humility, the grace of compassion, and the grace to mutual accountability. The pictures of servant, child, and sheep underscore our vulnerability and need of grace.

***The Promise: Grace in heaven is grace upon earth.***  Matthew 18:15-20

*“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” -- Matthew 18:18.*

We saw last week that forgiveness flows from the heart of God Himself. So we should not be surprised when Jesus explains that our earthly relationships will have God’s “grace stamp” upon them. Jesus is saying that when we seek reconciliation with our brother or sister, we are partaking of the divine mind and heart. He already had linked reconciliation and worship (Matthew 5:21-26), and here makes a direct application to the process of formal reconciliation if private conversations fail to do the job. We dare not write off or exclude others. Our relation-ships touch the heart of God. He watches. He participates. This is a deep and significant mystery which He then illustrates in a parable.

***The Peace: Grace given reflects grace received.*** Matthew 18:21-35

“I cancelled all that debt of yours because you asked me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had on you?” Matthew 18:32

The parable of the two debtors is profound, since Jesus applies it to our eternal destiny: if you don’t forgive, it proves you are not for-given. Why? Because grace has REAL effects in this life and the next. If we are so oblivious to our infinite debt to God that we can hold a grudge against a fellow sinner, it is proof that we have not dealt honestly with God about our own sin. Once we are broken with a full sense of our own sin, forgiving others is a given and relationships flourish.

 ***“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”***

Here lies the key to relationships. Our Holy Father in heaven is establishing His Kingdom upon earth. He gives us what we need: daily bread for our bodies and daily forgiveness for our souls. We avoid sin’s entanglements because He, the Holy One holds eternal power, authority, and glory. If we understand His nature and our need for grace, we will forgive our fellow sinners.