

Grace

Grace. The word permeates the book of Romans. And it reminds me of a story...

A college professor told his class that there would be three papers due that semester. He carefully explained his grading policies, told the students the due dates, and made clear that the papers must be turned in at the beginning of class. No work would be accepted late. Predictably, on the first due date a couple of students showed up to class without their papers. They each had a good excuse (an unexpected illness, a family emergency), and asked for permission to turn in the paper by the end of the day. The professor relented, and agreed not to lower their grades due to lateness.

On the second due date, a few more students showed up without papers. They all had excuses. The professor relented again, and allowed them to turn their papers in at the end of the day. But he wasn't happy about it.

When the third paper came due, almost half the class did not turn it in on time. Most didn't even bother with an excuse; they just delivered it to his office before 5:00. When they picked up the papers at the next class, many were quite dismayed to see much lower grades than they were used to getting. One student (one of the two who turned in the first paper late) challenged the professor. "That was an 'A' paper. How could you give me a 'C'?" "It was an 'A' paper," agreed the professor. "I lowered your grade because it was late." "But you didn't tell us you would do that. How is that just?"

"You want justice?" the professor asked as he pulled out his grade book. He went along the page and re-marked all three late papers with an F. He didn't stop with that one student either. He marked an F for every student's late work, going back throughout the semester. "There's your justice. I told you the rule at the beginning, and now you have your reward." He paused while the class sat there shocked. "Or perhaps you would rather have grace?" The class collectively nodded their heads silently. And he went back and restored their grades.

Monday – Loved

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." 1 John 4:16

1. Please read Romans 1:1-17. As you look at verse 7, what is the first thing Paul says about the believers at Rome?
2. The very middle of 1 John 4:16 contains a bold statement about God's nature. How does knowing that God is love help you in relating with God? How does it help you in your day to day life?
3. Read 1 John 4:19 and note the source of our own ability to love. How does knowing this help you love others?

Tuesday – Called

"Without a deep sense of calling many people drift into a toxic mix of drivenness... and the compulsive pursuit of leisure, a debilitating substitute for the freedom of the called life..." R. Paul Stevens – Everyday Christianity

1. What is the second thing Paul says in Romans 1:7 about the Christians in Rome?

Text insight: The word "saint" is similar to the word "sanctify." They both come from the same Latin root from which we get the word "sacred." The Greek word translated as "saints" in the New Testament (hagios), is sometimes also translated as "holy ones."

2. What does it mean to be called as a saint? According to Leviticus 20:26, what is the significance of being called as a holy one (saint)? Why? To whom do we belong?
3. The Bible covers this notion of being holy and set apart for God in many passages. New Testament examples include 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:13-16, and 1 Peter 1:15. What do these tell us about our calling?

Wednesday – Blessed

"Many years ago, I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out of God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness and grace to other people..."

David Seamands

1. What does Paul deliver to his readers in the second half of Romans 1:7?
2. Grace was a word typically used as a greeting by Greek-speaking gentiles, while peace was a common greeting among Aramaic-speaking Jews. Why do you think Paul used both greetings?

Making it personal: When we truly believe and receive the grace of God, it leads to a remarkable peace with him. What is holding you back from believing, receiving and living out of God's grace in your life?

Thursday – Included

1. Please read Romans 1:7. From whom does Paul bring greetings to the Christians in Rome?
2. John 10:27-33 provides insight into the relationship of Jesus with God the Father. What is the nature of that relationship?
3. As we look back at Romans 1:7, we realize that we are a part of this relationship. God is *our* Father. We are his children. What does this mean for how you will live your life today?

Friday – A Man Called Out

1. Please read Genesis 12:1-5. What was the nature of God's calling of Abram (later renamed Abraham)?
2. Verse 4 says that Abraham was 75 years old, and verse 5 tells us he was married and wealthy. If you were called out from home at that stage of life, what would be your likely response? According to the beginning of verse 4, what was Abraham's response?
3. Normally we view the idea of being "called" as something that is for "super saints" or Bible heroes. But, Paul insists that we are no less "called" than Abraham. What is the nature of God's calling upon our lives? In what ways are you living out his calling? In what ways are you not?

For the Weekend: Read Genesis 12:1-5, John 10:27-30, Romans 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:13-16. What does it mean in your life to belong to Jesus, to be called by God? Ask God to show you how you can be holy and a blessing at the same time.