

Sunday, Oct. 5

We reviewed the last five verses of Romans 7 before delving into the beginning of chapter 8. Pastor Steve continued with his emphasis on the war against sin and how it is a fight; we must never make peace with it. We can't say that because we've always had a problem with our temper, it's okay to punch someone in the mouth. When a Christian sins, they always feel shame and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, saying, "This is not who you are. You are a child of God. Don't do it."

"Don't feed the monster," Steve said. "If you have a proclivity to anger, don't sit around thinking of ways you can beat some guy up. If you have a problem with lust, why would you watch movies with sex scenes? Knowing we're in this war is also knowing that we will never arrive."

Quoting Philippians 3:12, where Paul talks about pressing on for the goal of perfection, Steve said this is what the Christian life looks like: Jesus has made us His. He pursued love and came after us. We weren't searching for Him; He came looking for us. God Himself is the point. We are going to get a new set of emotions and a new mind, but we won't get it until we get to heaven. The Holy Spirit is the down payment on heaven. This means that while Christians aren't perfect, they're on the way toward perfection.

"Romans 6:14 says sin will not have dominion over you," Steve said. "But the wretched man remains. You must rest, knowing it is Jesus who broke the power of sin. Paul wants you to know something about this struggle."

After reading Romans 8:1-4, which begins with, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," he said that is one of the most beautiful sentences ever written. Condemnation comes when a judge says you are guilty, but Paul is saying there isn't any for those who are in Christ. This tells struggling believers that they aren't in trouble if they think their bad deeds don't outweigh the good. That's because God has done what the law couldn't do.

God looked at humans and said we can't become righteous, yet many of us are trying to do that. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life and fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law. When we stand before God and Satan tries to declare we are guilty, he may be right, but you and I will be judged by the righteousness of Christ, Steve said.

"This is the most wonderful sentence I can announce," Steve said. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Sunday, Oct. 12

We focused today on Romans 8:1 and its promise of no condemnation for Christ's followers. Pastor Steve said there are three keys here: 1) what "now" means, 2) what "no condemnation" means, 3) what it means to be in Christ Jesus. This verse signals a new era of salvation freedom. The removal of condemnation is a present tense reality: "If you are a Christian, you are not under the condemning wrath of God." After reading John 3:36, where Jesus said whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, he added, "This is Jesus, the Son of the living God, describing: 'If you believe in Me, you have eternal life. If you don't, the wrath of God remains on you. It's like a legal declaration. Because of Adam, everyone is guilty.'"

After reading Ephesians 2:3 and Paul's reminder that we were "children of wrath" by nature, Steve said this wrath rests on all who live outside of Jesus. Romans 2:8 says those who are self-seeking and unrighteous will face God's fury. "This is why Romans 8:1 is so wonderful," Steve said. "There is no condemnation. You can't earn this present-tense reality. The 'now' reality is yours. If you don't understand the wrath being stored up for (the enemies) of Jesus, you will never understand the grace of God."

As for the second point, on "no condemnation," he said that Isaiah 53 talks about how it was the will of the Lord to crush Jesus. Christ substituted His life for ours. The Son did not want to drink this cup; He was weighed down by the idea that He must bear the weight of mankind's sin. After reading 2 Timothy 4:1 and Acts 10:42, Steve said there is a future aspect to God's wrath, as revealed in Revelation 20:11-14, which discusses the great throne judgment and the lake of fire.

However, Romans 8:1 says there is nothing to fear from this judgment because our name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. God's wrath has already dropped on His Son, so it won't drop on us. Christianity is not about us figuring out how to be a better person, but being joined to the Savior who took our punishment.

"Romans 8:1 tells me I'm not under God's wrath anymore," Steve said. "I'm under the grace of God. The wrath of God was already appointed to (Jesus) so it won't fall on you or me. It is wonderful news." After reading Hebrews 9:27-28, he said, "That's awesome (that) He's coming back. The Bible says those who are eagerly awaiting Him have accepted Christ and His salvation. No condemnation means we can make confident war on our own sin."

Sunday, Oct. 19

Today was our annual service at Howells Mill Christian Assembly, marking the end of the Youth Retreat. One of the themes that emerged from the presentations by different age groups was how we need each other to make it through life—especially the Christian life. Grade schoolers talked about the refinement of wrestling with issues and supporting each other, and how when you're feeling down somebody else can support you.

The first middle school group called themselves "Wave Breakers" and how when life sends a wave crashing over us, God will help us through. The second group, "Lilac Pickles," talked about dealing with their two biggest fears: public speaking and dying. Their favorite parts of the weekend were playing cards and talking with counselors.

Brooke urged us to pray for the high school girls because of the burdens they face. Participants mentioned their favorite activities being small group discussions and discussing philosophical questions, as well as feeling closeness with each other. As one girl put it, "We can't do life alone."

Several of the high school boys got sick during the weekend, so the original group of seven had declined to three by Sunday morning. They talked about the fight *of* your life being the fight *for* your life. They also mentioned the value of community and spending time together with Christian brothers and sisters; we can help each other with struggles. At the end of their time, Tabettha (who spearheaded camp preparations) talked about how she appreciates the young men showing the younger boys how to live as Christian men.

Sunday, Oct. 26

We looked at Romans 8:1-2, with Pastor Steve reviewing the three main points of the “no condemnation” in verse 1: 1) this is a present-tense reality, 2) it’s also a future-tense reality of Judgment Day, 3) there is nothing we can do to earn God’s favor or prove we deserve His grace.

“In Christ we are unified with (the Father),” Steve said. “We are placed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. You have a disease called sin, but you’re getting better because of the Lord of the castle ... Quit listening to the world. You are in Christ; make your identity in Christ.”

The “For” that begins verse 2 is another way of saying “because.” Steve said the apostle Paul was explaining how verse 1 happened. He called it useful and practical to know that the reason we have been set free from the law of sin and death is because of a superior law: the law of the Spirit and life. Most of the time in Romans, Paul is talking about the law of Moses, handed down some 1,500 years earlier. But here he is talking about the principle of authority and power.

This is similar to how the law of gravity can be superseded by the law of lift; the law of life in Christ overrides the law of sin and death, Steve said. He turned to James 1:13-15, where the apostle talked of how we can get tempted to sin by our own desires: “The way James describes sin he’s saying the power inherent in you and me. We’re enticed by something we desire and it brings forth death. It always works. The law of sin and death is what we’re at war with.”

The promise of Romans 8:2 reflects what Paul said earlier in Romans 6:14, about sin having no dominion over us; and Romans 6:18, where Paul said we have been set free from sin. This superior law of life in Christ has set us free, said Steve, adding that what Jesus did at the cross was take all our sin and be punished for it. Because He did, God the Father identifies us with Christ’s righteousness.

Steve drew a comparison with the two towers in *Lord of the Rings*, with both powers evil and united in their effort to overcome good—but the heroes win. For the Christian, this is what has happened in Christ. He has given believers freedom from the power of sin that used to dominate their life. We participate with the Holy Spirit in this empowering work: “Romans 8 tells you that victory is already yours. The evidence is the work of the Spirit.”