

Sunday, Apr. 5

Pastor Steve opened by noting that people come to church on Easter expecting to hear the news that Jesus is risen. And we should want to hear that because it's the greatest news ever proclaimed, he said. Other gods and religions have a system of rules for people to follow, but we follow Christ, who has risen from the dead.

Here, Steve emphasized Revelation 1 and John recalling how he fell at Jesus's feet when he saw the Lord, but Jesus told John not to fear. He is alive forever and has the keys to death and Hades. Jesus is alive forever after tasting death on our behalf and defeating it. Jesus is our triumphant Savior.

"He destroyed the works of the devil, which is what he said he came to do," Steve said. "Colossians says that at the cross, He made an open show of the devil, of principalities and powers. "'Open show' sounds maybe like something the Bible would slip in there just to be confusing, but an open show really means that when a conquering king beat another king, they didn't just come back from the war and say, 'We won.'

"They came back from the war parading the king that they had defeated through the streets to make an open show of the defeat. Frequently, they cut off their thumbs and their toes just for extra excitement ... they could never hold a sword again, and they could never plant their feet in battle."

Jesus has defeated Satan and the power of death, he added. He is the sin bearer and the wrath taker. In the Old Testament, the Bible says anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. That's one reason the Pharisees wanted Jesus to hang on a cross so badly, so they could argue that no Messiah would ever be cursed on a tree. Yet, they didn't know they were fulfilling the Scripture that said Jesus would become a curse for us so we could receive the blessing of Abraham.

Steve said we could also be grafted into the family of God; Jesus did what was necessary for us to receive salvation. By bearing our sin, He took God's wrath, which is a very real anger. But Jesus took that wrath and placed it on the cross.

"What is it to be a Christian?" he asked. "It's to look at the cross, the old rugged cross that I will cherish. It's to look at the cross and say that is where God dealt with my sin. You can't deal with it yourself. You're not smart enough. You're not good enough ... to bear your own sin and you're certainly not good enough to withstand the wrath of God."

Sunday, Apr. 12

We returned to the Romans series and 8:12-17. "Led by the Spirit" began with a note on verse 9's use of "in the Spirit," a phrase mentioned 22 times in chapter 8. If you belong to Christ, you do have the Spirit, Steve said. Christians have the Spirit because they are born again of the Spirit. "Because I was born of the Spirit and His grace changed who I am fundamentally, I will in faith live like a Christian, although imperfectly," he said.

However, he cautioned we must avoid two extremes: 1) Because God has done it all and saved you, and grace can't be undone, we're free to live however we choose. 2) If we don't "live right," we are going to hell. The questions such condemnation raises are things like: Why am I still having lustful thoughts? Why do I still like to gossip at work?

In Romans 7, Paul talks about the struggles that he fought—as do people today. But Scripture is clear that the grace of God is the only thing that saves us, not our holiness or efforts to live sinlessly, Steve said.

“The Spirit of Christ dwells in you,” Steve said. “He changed who you are. With the Spirit of God, you believe you are His possession. You were bought with a price. You are made righteous before God because of the righteousness of Christ. It’s (a) beautiful and wonderful (thing).”

Sometimes, we fail to appreciate the strangeness of a faith that promises those who died in Christ will be raised from the dead when He returns, Steve said. However, we can rest assured our bodies will live forever because God designed them. And, because of what Jesus has done, we are no longer enslaved by sin. Romans 6:6-7 says our old self was crucified with Christ, meaning we are dead to sin; 8:14 says all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

The evidence we belong to Christ and have received His nature is when we are led by the Spirit; those who walk in the Spirit will not be led by their flesh. Yet there is a warning: those who are led by the Spirit must recognize that Christians are at war and called to put sin to death.

“Christians are those who kill sin,” Steve said, “who say: ‘Lord, help me put to death the sins of the body.’ The reason they hate sin is because they are Christians. It’s why Paul says to test yourself to see if you are in the faith. ... Why do I desire to live for God? That desire doesn’t come from me. (It’s from) the Spirit.”

Sunday, Apr. 19

We looked at Romans 8:12-17, with Pastor Steve saying Christians are not to operate in the flesh. We do not owe a debt to the tyranny of the flesh; we are debtors to the Spirit. As verse 14 says, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” And in verse 15, Paul says we have received the Spirit of adoption, making us children of God.

“The Spirit of God is in us, bearing witness to God,” Steve said. “We are crying out (because) we are His children. We are at war. We have to put to death the deeds of the body. This is violence. It’s an active verb. ‘Put to death’ means to kill, to put to death. You could say ‘murder.’ I am at war with sin.”

He noted that if eternal life was up to us, we would all go to hell. That emphasizes the truth that salvation is the gift of God—an effervescence that bubbles up within and changes us. If we have the Holy Spirit we will be led to live by the Spirit and make war on sin. The message of the gospel is: Yes, you are saved and secure, but you will have to make war on sin and get bloody knuckles.

Verse 13 is talking about putting to death the deeds of the body, not the devil, Steve said. He pointed out that Satan doesn’t show up in Romans until chapter 16—the last one. Asking how we can point sins to death, he read Matthew 16:24-25, where Jesus talks about taking up our cross and following Him.

“How in the world do I do it?” he said. “How do I put to death the deeds of the body? You have to understand you belong to Him. From this position, you are fighting. This is war ... The devil tries to make you think you need to do something to earn your keep.”

Steve outlined a few practical things we can do:

1. Set our mind on Christ every day, as Colossians 3:1-3 advises. We have to treat our prayer like war, as well as worship, sing, and praise to God. Read Scripture daily and take up the sword of the Spirit.

2. Flee temptation and pursue righteousness. He called this “righteous running,” not away from sin but toward righteousness. If struggling, call or text a friend, or pray: “Lord, help me fight.”

3. Look to Titus 2:11-14, where Paul says God’s grace trains us and helps us live righteously. “The grace of God trains us to renounce the things of unrighteousness,” Steve said. “It’s not willpower or promising to do better that (helps us win), it’s the grace of God.”

Sunday, Apr. 26

We were to cover part 2 of “Bloody War and Cooing Babies,” but Pastor Steve sensed the Holy Spirit leading him to review more practical suggestions on putting to death the deeds of the body. He noted that born-again believers are to make war with sin: “Satan doesn’t take you down, sin does. (The devil) doesn’t have the power or authority to do anything. He is a lackey on a leash.”

In reviewing Romans 8:12-17, he pointed out verse 14, which says all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Yet, our flesh is a problem. Steve read a commentary in which the author said that our human nature does not automatically fall away when we become Christians. The way to put the deeds of the body to death is to follow the Spirit. He reminded us of previous points:

1. Set our minds on Christ.
2. Have regular times of prayer and worship, which have to become habits.
3. Read and memorize Scripture.

Here, Steve read Titus 2:11-14, in which Paul says that God’s grace has brought salvation to all people. “The grace of God trains us to say ‘no’ to the way we used to live,” he said. “If you are a Christian, the grace of God is at work within you, training you to live for Christ.”

The training grace offers is designed to turn us into zealots for good works, Steve said. Rather than looking to ourselves to accomplish this, we should pray, “I need help, Lord, I need You every day.” Then he said he wanted to show us what he means when he says to pray the Scriptures.

He started with Psalm 34, reading with emotion and drama in his voice as he interspersed comments into the passage. When he reached verse 8, where David wrote, “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” Steve added, “Lord, I know You are good. Thank You, that you deliver me.” In reading Romans 5:1-5, when he reached verse 5, he said “me” instead of “us” in the phrase, “Hope does not put us to shame.”

After mentioning Psalm 119:11, he talked of hiding God’s Word in his heart: “I need Your help, Lord, because I am struggling.” With Proverbs 3:5-8, he prayed, “Lord, I am trusting in You. I am not leaning to my own understanding.” After Psalm 37:23-24, he said, “Lord, I feel like I am falling more than I am walking. Thank You for helping guide my steps.”

After finishing with Philippians 4:6-9, Steve said, “I didn’t plan to give you a dramatic display, but this is what it sounds like to go before the Lord.”