

Sunday, May 3

Pastor Steve continued in Romans 8 today, opening with verse 14: “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” He said that means those who put the deeds of the body to death must be born-again believers who rely on the Holy Spirit.

“How do I know I’m a Christian?” Steve asked. “When I sin, the Spirit within me says, ‘No. Stop! What are you doing?’ Sin is no longer pleasant. It’s not just that you put to death the deeds of the body, Paul wants you to know if you are led by the Spirit of God, you are sons of God.”

This is why Paul is making such a big deal out of walking in the Spirit. He bears witness to Jesus—the light that shined into the world Jesus made, yet the world did not know Him. While His own people didn’t receive Him, all who believe in His name can become His children.

Reading verse 15 about our adoption, Steve said this shows two things: 1) we are not slaves of sin, 2) we do not have the spirit of fear. We have something to look forward to, since we have received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has come into our hearts with the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

“That is incredible,” Steve said. “Christ says you can’t live right without God. When you receive Jesus, the Spirit of God saves you. He rescues you and me and puts a new heart in you next to His guarantee that He stays within me. ... The Holy Spirit brings life and illuminates His Word.”

The Spirit’s guarantee is a down payment on heaven, in the same way we put down earnest money to buy a house. God is saying that He is giving us an earnest payment in our hearts, letting us know that one day we will go to heaven. Everything will be totally different there, since we will get a new body. He intends that we enjoy what He has done, but in our earthly bodies, we don’t have the capacity to enjoy all that He’s done. That’s why we need a new one.

Steve referenced Ephesians 1:13 and us being “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,” which guarantees our inheritance. While we have to live in this world with all its misery, we have a promise of a future in heaven. That is how martyrs of the past could sing hymns while they were being burned at the stake.

“They knew they belonged to God and they knew they had received the Holy Spirit as a down payment,” Steve said. “That guarantee is foolproof.”

Sunday, May 10

“Mothers: Unstoppable Stewards of Grace” was based on 2 Timothy 4:6-17. In his Mother’s Day sermon, Pastor Steve noted that Paul wrote this book about 68 A.D., shortly before his beheading by Nero. The Roman emperor would also set believers on fire to illuminate his gardens at night. At this point, Paul is alone except for Luke; the apostle is a believer when it wasn’t a good time to be a Christian.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage Timothy and remind him of the faith he had learned from Timothy’s mother and grandmother. Steve then read 1 Timothy 3:1-5, which mentions Eunice and Lois and “dwells in you as well.” Paul exhorts the young pastor to “fan into flame” the gift of God he had received.

“Paul reminded Timothy he had a calling ...,” Steve said. “In remembering his mother and grandmother and the sincere faith they had, Paul reminded him of his childhood. ... His mother grew up in the faith of Abraham and became a Christian in the early days of the church. In an environment of Christians being burned alive Paul says, ‘Remember who you are. God has not given you a spirit of fear. Let’s go.’”

Here, Steve reminded mothers how important they are to their children, since their influence lasts a lifetime. Mothering and raising children to follow God is a means of grace, he said. Noting the importance of Eunice and Lois, Paul uses their example as a remind to the timid young pastor to stay the course.

After reading Proverbs 6:20-22, he said, “To kids of all ages, listen to your Mom’s teaching, Mom’s preparation, and Mom’s love. When I got hurt as a kid, I never went to Dad. Moms nurture. They have an instinct to protect. All these instincts God has given mothers are saturated in Scripture and prayer.”

Turning to 2 Timothy 3:10-17, he said the passage Paul was instructing Timothy in how he should act. Recalling the suffering that he had been through, Paul advised Timothy to expect similar persecution. Christianity means laying down your life and picking up your cross. Pointing to Timothy’s mother and grandmother teaching him the Word, Steve told all mothers present that they were teaching Scripture to children who may face persecution. At the least, they are going into a world that teaches there is no objective truth.

“You don’t have to be a scholar,” he said. “Read it to them. When they’re mad at someone, teach them to forgive. When they don’t want to do their homework, teach them to do it anyway. Mingle Scripture (into) their lives. When people grow up, they need to remember what they were taught as kids.”

Sunday, May 17

We looked at Romans 8:14-18. Pastor Steve said a Christian is never completely free of sin, but can grow in knowledge and holiness because of the Holy Spirit’s leading. But the position of a Christian is a determination to put sin to death.

“Christians are fighting the good fight of faith,” Steve said. “Romans 6 says we are set free (from) sin. Romans 7 says we are no longer slaves of sin; we are children of God ... You have received the Spirit of adoption.”

Referring to *Little Orphan Annie*, Steve talked about the privileges Annie could enjoy after being adopted by the richest man in the world. We too have been adopted, with Paul stressing that we are close because we are in God’s family. We can say, “Abba, Father” is because of the Spirit of adoption.

“You are a child, a blood-bought child of the redeemed because of the Holy Spirit,” Steve said. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Some kind of communication is happening. This testifies to us: ‘You belong to me.’”

Still, doubts and personal questions arise, something Steve said is part of our walk with the Lord. He read a quote from famed British pastor Martin Lloyd Jones, which referenced John 7:37-39 and how belief in Christ means that out of our heart will flow rivers of living water. That sounds like a powerful interaction in our relationship with the

Holy Spirit. This was the promise that Old Testament saints were looking forward to; God is bringing His people together in the Spirit.

If you are a Christian, Steve said, you are still likely to at some point face the question: Am I really God's? To answer that question, he pointed to Romans 8:16 and the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are indeed children of God. Here, he offered some practical advice for affirming that belief:

1. Don't spend your day trying to "feel" like a Christian. In extreme cases this can lead to insanity. Steve said there are days when he doesn't feel like a believer.

2. Remember there are moments when God is at work, bearing witness to us that we are a child of God. The Spirit reminds us of that truth.

3. The recognition that the Spirit of God is present in our lives is a desire to obey God's commandments, even though we will do it imperfectly. A Christian hates sin, and avoiding sin is the evidence of salvation.

"You have a desire to be pleasing to Him," Steve said. "That you say no to sin, and when you do, you run to Him and ask for forgiveness."

Sunday, May 24

"Heirs of God" focused on Romans 8:14-18. Pastor Steve pointed out that the life of a Christian is constantly turning to Jesus; the Bible describes us as passive recipients of God's grace. Posing the question: what does it mean to be an heir of Christ?, he looked at Romans 4:13, which says we are saved by faith, not by works of the law. The earth is God's creation and we are heirs of that world because the promise Abraham received from God is also promised to us.

"You are saved too and an heir of the world," Steve said. "We are joint heirs with Christ. ... Galatians 3:16 says we are (Abraham's) offspring; there is no "s" on the word, which is important. It refers to one, who is Christ. Jesus is the heir of the promise to Abraham. He is the heir. There was a Messiah coming and he (Abraham) is the seed."

He then read such verses as 1) Romans 2:8, which speaks of God's fury toward those who don't obey the truth; 2) Hebrews 1:1-2, which talks of the supremacy of God's Son, and 3) Galatians 3:29, which says those who are Christ's are Abraham's offspring. Going back to Romans 8:17, Steve said we stand to inherit everything, which makes our fleshly desires and fears pretty insignificant. The same is true of illnesses or car accidents. People have been gladly burned at the stake because of the promise of God's inheritance.

"It's happening right now in Iran, China, and other places," Steve said. "People are suffering horrible things, and it's insignificant." After talking of how the recent gasoline increases meant he had to pay \$120 to fill his tank this week, he added, "Church, this is temporary. It's not all that there is. You're not going to get it all here. Who cares?"

Calling it "awesome," Steve said God is the greatest thing in the universe. So if He gave us everything we wanted—food, pleasures, leisure time, and so forth—and withheld Himself, it would mean He hated us. God has made us to be people who crave Him, and we get to be with Him forever.

When the apostle Paul said everything was hung on him, he wrote that because he knew that God was the greatest thing he could ever hope to have. After reading Ephesians

2:5-7, Steve said in the coming ages God would show us the immeasurable riches of His grace, over and over.

“It will be never-ending,” he said. “We have a home, and this isn’t it. It’s going to take all of eternity for God to show us how great that is.”

Sunday, May 31

Today’s sermon was titled “Heirs Who Suffer,” based on Romans 8:16-18. Pastor Steve started by pointing out that the day is coming when we will weep with joy over what we have inherited as heirs of Christ. What we see now are nudges from the Holy Spirit over the fuller picture we will see in eternity.

“We get glimpses of what it means that we belong to Him,” said Steve about feelings we may experience at a funeral. “It will be awesome. We inherit God. You’ve received the Spirit of God. Then (Paul) says words we don’t want to hear: verse 17, ‘provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.’ (But) I want you to hear that nowhere does God say we must suffer to make you sad.”

Rather, the attitude expressed in verse 17 is that there is something greater to the experience, Steve said. It is saying that if you are a Christian, you can expect to suffer, but there will be a purpose to the suffering. And, God will comfort us through it. He said there are several points to keep in mind, starting with the fact we are destined to suffer—and so that is proof we are in the Christian life.

After Acts 14:21-22 and its note about tribulation, he said that is at odds with life in America, where we have made comfort a primary goal in life. We are persuaded that comfort is a wonderful thing, even though Scripture says we will go through tribulation on our way to heaven. While saying he doesn’t know exactly what that will mean, Steve mentioned 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 and its teaching that we are destined for affliction.

A second main point is that the sharing of suffering is the reality of the Christians life. However, 1 Timothy 1:8 and 2 Timothy 2:8-12 teach that we are not expected to bear this suffering by ourselves. Steve said it is the power of God that enables us to endure the suffering. For instance, Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter and was cold, asking for a cloak. But he endured the suffering for the body of Christ.

“He who endures to the end will be saved,” Steve said. “God is who causes you to endure to the end. This is telling me that we may not suffer like Paul, although there are people around the world to whom this verse is precious.”

Finally, suffering will come full circle. After reading 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, he said there is purpose in suffering, especially that we will be able to comfort others, just as God has comforted us.