

Romans 6... 7... 8

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Let's start at the end (again).

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

I came across this quote in my research this week:

The body of the murderer is sometimes tied to the corpse of his victim...

It's from a book titled *Sociology Based Upon Ethnography*¹ published in 1893. It was describing punishment for a murderer in Tibet.

There are other accounts of ancient people punishing murderers in this manner. They fastened the body of the victim to that of the killer, tying shoulder to shoulder, back to back, thigh to thigh, arm to arm, and then drove the murderer from the community. So tight were the bonds that he could not free himself, and after a few days the decay in the body of death spread to the living flesh of the murderer. As he stalked the land, there was none to help him remove the body of death. He had only the frightful prospect of his own slow, gangrenous death.²

Drawing from this physical analogy, Paul makes a spiritual application of **the body of death**. He describes himself by saying, **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** (v24). Paul, as a Christian, saw himself carrying around a **body of death**. He describes this internal **body of death** several different ways:

v14 ...**I am carnal**...

v17 ...**sin...dwells in me**...

v21 ...**evil is present with me**...

v25 ...**the flesh**...

¹ Charles Létourneau, Henry Merivale Trollope, Charles Jean Marie Letourneau

²Barnhouse, *Romans*, Vol. 3, Book 2, p.241. (also International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

This **body of death** is the flesh that continues to exist within you after you are saved. Think of yourself as the new spiritual person you are having been born-again but surrounded by your flesh as if it is strapped on you.

What is the flesh? It is a little hard to define and commentators are all over the map. The flesh is not my sin nature I was born with. I know that because Paul distinguishes between my sin nature and my flesh.

It is not the physical body itself. The physical body has its needs but they are neutral.

The flesh is something I find at work *within* my physical body. It is that tendency, that inclination, those impulses, to use my physical body in sinful ways.

The flesh has been expertly trained in sinful habits by two sources:

1. First, the world system, in its spirit of rebellion against God, trains the flesh.
2. Second, the devil tempts the flesh.

Even though you are born again with a new nature, and even though you become a partaker of God's own divine nature, the flesh remains. As a result a great struggle begins, a spiritual conflict - a war within. As you read in Galatians 5:17 ...**the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

Are you doomed to wretchedness, with the body of death filling your spiritual nostrils with its stench? Not if you can also say, **I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (7:25).

Paul is describing the common experience that all Christians encounter throughout their earthly lifetimes. At the same time, it is an experience that he wishes us to avoid as much as possible. As one author said,

"The Christian must get out of Chapter Seven and into Chapter Eight, though [it is not] a one time thing....We so often find ourselves straying back into Romans Seven."³

One of the reasons we sometimes “stray back” to chapter seven is because we forget we’ve been set free from living according to the Law of God. In verses one through four we learned that, because we died with Jesus, we died to the Law of God and law in general as a principle of life. We are now married to the Lord. We live in a personal, intimate, dynamic relationship with Him.

Life before Jesus was dominated by **the body of death** (the flesh). All the Law of God could do was point it out! You will “stray back into” Romans Seven anytime and every time you try to put yourself under the law as your means of growth and maturity.

Paul demonstrated the danger of going back to the Law as a means of daily living.

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

Paul was once a person trying hard to keep God’s Law. He was a top-notch Pharisee. He honestly admitted that the only **fruit** his life produced were **sinful passions**.

Elsewhere Paul speaks of this fruit as the works of the flesh: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries** (Galatians 5:19-21).

In a stunning realization Paul said that instead of taming **sinful passions** God’s Law **aroused** them! By naming and then forbidding sins it stirred up the strong desire to do them. There’s something about telling us to not do something that peaks our curiosity and arouses a desire to do it!

Gayle Erwin illustrates this by telling the story of the parents who, just as they are leaving their child with the sitter, say, “Don’t stick a bean

³Jay Adams, *The War Within*, p. 68

up your nose!” Never even thought about doing it until it was forbidden! The only thing you can be certain of is now the child wants to stick a bean up their nose.

God’s Law, and law in general as a way of life, did not overcome sinful passions. It did not slay the flesh. It only highlighted our sinfulness. And that is the real purpose of God’s perfect and holy Law: to show us our sin and need for a Savior from it.

Romans 7:6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

Because we died with Jesus at Calvary, we are dead to the law and delivered from its dominion over us as a principle of either justification or of sanctification.

1. The law does not justify us; it does not make us right with God.
2. The law does not sanctify us; it does not take us deeper with God and make us more holy before Him.

Our freedom is given not so we can stop serving God; but so that we can serve Him better, under the **newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter**.

Our service is motivated by love, not fear; it is a service of freedom, not bondage. It is no longer a question of slavishly adhering to minute details of forms and ceremonies but of the joyful outpouring of ourselves for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

The **oldness of the letter** is life under the Law, trying to please God by keeping its rules and regulations. **Newness of spirit** speaks of the New Covenant, of an entirely new way of living (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36). “No longer will I give you tables of stone,” the Lord declares in the New Covenant, “but I will write My will upon the table of your heart.”

Jon Courson:

Some days [God] might awaken you at 4:30 A.M. to seek [His] face and to pray, while other times, [He] might tell you to sleep in. That’s the way Christianity was

meant to be. But what have we done? We have constructed legalistic systems and expectations both personally and corporately. We were meant to live in a newness of the Spirit, moment by moment obeying, yielding, and asking, "Lord, what next?" Therefore, throw off the yoke of legalism. Walk in the Spirit. Respond to His direction.

Freedom can be scary to us. Yes, we can abuse it by indulging our **sinful passions** and calling it 'liberty.' But we won't overcome sin by adding rules and regulations to grace.

We overcome by walking in love with the Lord moment-by-moment.

