

Romans 6 – Body of Sin

Romans Series (Part 12)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Jan 26, 2014

Opening Remarks:

- A. Welcome back to another study of the book of Romans from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we took a break from our series on Romans to interact with some of the great **Listener Feedback** we have been getting recently. Since one of our listeners asked about the resurrection of some saints at the time of Jesus's resurrection, which is mentioned in Matthew 27:52-53, we spent some time with that text, showing that it seems to be talking about the "first resurrection" event that is described in more detail in Revelation 20:4-5.
- C. We got some excellent feedback from that lesson on Matt 27:52-53. But I simply have not had the time to thoroughly interact with all of it, so we will put that on hold until our next Listener Feedback session in a month or so. In this session we need to pick back up where we left off three weeks ago in our study on the thirteen uses of the word "body" here in the book of Romans.
- D. Let's pray before we begin:

Our matchless Redeemer and Creator: We exalt you and praise you and thank you for sending Your Son to die in our place and pay for our sins. We owe a debt we can not pay, and He paid in full that debt that He did not owe. Help us to understand just how much we owe, and how much He paid. And help us to forgive our fellow servants who owe us so little in comparison to what we owe you. We are so thankful for your servant Apostle Paul who reminds us of this in his letter to the saints in Rome. Help us to forgive others the same way we have been forgiven by You. Use your Word through your servant Paul to lead us in your ways. We pray this in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus. Amen.

Context of Romans 6 (NAS95)

Before looking at the two verses in Romans 6 which use the word "body" (verses 6 and 12), we need to get familiar with the context. In seminary courses on a particular book of the Bible, they always require several readings of the whole book before they start exegeting individual verses. Quite often they require reading it in several different translations. That is what we are going to do here. We need to be familiar with the context surrounding these "body" verses, so that we can interpret them in harmony with their context.

It is easy to assign any meaning we want to a text when it is lifted out of its context. But when we plug it back into its context, we will find out whether that meaning is correct or not, simply by seeing if it harmonizes with its context and makes sense of its context.

The context is king. No amount of similar verses outside the context can determine its

meaning unless the context verifies that meaning. *The context is the most powerful resource we have for determining the meaning of a specific text, and truth-seekers should always make thorough use of it.*

Both views of the "body" (individual and collective) can make a *plausible* case for their respective interpretations here in Romans. And both views are indeed *possible* when examined merely on the basis of grammatical structure and other related texts. But arguments from Greek word definitions, sentence structure, or grammatical form and function *can never be conclusive* unless they are *validated by the context*. So, ultimately we have to go to the context to finally decide which of the two interpretations is correct.

And that is what we are going to do with all of these "body" texts here in Romans. We will analyze them in their respective contexts to see what *kind of body* (individual or collective) they are actually referring to. In this session we will deal with the first two of them that are found in chapter six (verses 6 and 12). I have copied the whole chapter for us to look at. You might want to print it out to look at as we study.

One of the most interesting translations of the book of Romans that I have seen is the one by F. F. Bruce in his book, *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase*. As its subtitle suggests, it is not a literal word-for-word translation, but more of an expanded paraphrase. It brings out the sense of the text quite often in a fresh new way. You will want to place your own favorite Bible translation out to the side to compare with Bruce's translation as we read it together. We are going to start in chapter five, verse 18:

Taken From: *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase*, by F. F. Bruce

[Rom 5:18-21] To sum up: it was through one man's fall that all men found themselves involved in condemnation; and similarly it is through one man's righteousness that all men are blessed with a justification which brings life in its train. For just as the many **received the status of sinners** through the one man's disobedience, so the many will be **set right with God** through the one man's obedience. It was to make sinful acts increase the more that law came in – by a side road, so to speak – but where sin increased, divine grace increased more exceedingly. God's purpose in this was that, as **sin had dominated the situation**, with death as its inevitable sequel, so **grace should dominate the situation**, and do so righteously, with eternal life as its goal, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[Rom 6:1-2] "Well, then," I hear someone say, "if divine grace increased more exceedingly where sin increased, why not go on sinning, in order that divine grace may increase yet more?" Perish the thought! We died as far as **our relation to sin** is concerned; how can we **go on living in sin**?

[Rom 6:3-14] Do you not know that when we were baptized into membership of Christ Jesus, we were baptized into **participation in His death**? [4] That is why we were buried with Him in our baptism. The purpose of this participation in His death and burial was that we should **for the future live a new life**, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power. [5] You see, it follows inevitably that if we were identified with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also be identified with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. [6] Understand this: our old inherited self was crucified with Him, so that **the material with which sin had to operate might be put out of action**. Consequently, we are no longer in bondage to sin: [7] once a man has died, he is quit of the claims of sin upon him. [8] I repeat: if we shared the death of Christ, we believe that we shall also share His resurrection life. We know very well that Christ, [9] now that He has been raised from the dead, can never die again: death can no longer claim any power over Him. [10] As regards His death, He died once for all in relation to sin; as regards His life, He lives evermore for God. [11] Similarly, you too must count yourselves dead in relation to sin, and alive henceforth for God by virtue of your incorporation in Christ Jesus. [12] So **do not allow sin to dominate your mortal bodies** any more so that you are forced to obey its cravings. [13] Do not go on **presenting your bodily members as instruments which sin may use** to do all sorts of wrong things. No: present yourselves to God as people who have come back from death to live a new life; **present your bodily members to God as instruments which He may use** to do righteous deeds. [14] Sin will have no further power over you, now that you are no longer living "under law" but under the grace of God.

[Rom 6:15-23] But again I hear someone say: "Well, then, let us sin, since we are no longer living under law but under the grace of God." And again I say, "Perish the thought!" [16] Look at it this way. If you present yourselves to someone as slaves, to render him obedience, you are the slaves of that person to whom you render obedience. So you have this choice: you may be slaves of sin, with death to look forward to; or you may be slaves rendering obedience to God, with righteousness as the outcome. [17] And God be thanked that you, who once were slaves of sin, have now rendered heart-obedience to that pattern of teaching which was delivered to you. [18] You have been emancipated from sin's ownership; you have become "enslaved" to righteousness. [19] I am using an analogy from human life to help your natural weakness. Let me repeat: once you **presented your bodily members as slaves** to impurity and lawlessness, adding to the sum of lawlessness; now, on the contrary, you must **present them as "slaves" to righteousness**, and the result will be holiness of life. [20] When you were slaves of sin, you were "free" from the control of righteousness. [21] But what did you get out of it? Things which now you are ashamed to think about. Things which lead to death. [22] But now you have been emancipated from the ownership of sin; you have become slaves of God. And now you have as the outcome of your service things which promote holiness, things which lead to eternal life. [23] Sin pays its slaves the wages of death; God bestows a free gift, and that free gift of His is the eternal life which is ours by union with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice the words I put in **red letters** (verses 6, 12, 13, 19). These are the verses which use the word "body" either explicitly or implicitly. Now compare those verses in Bruce's translation with the same verses in your own favorite translation. In verse 6, Bruce says, **"the material with which sin had to operate might be put out of action"** instead of **"our body of sin might be done away with."** Do you see what Bruce is saying here? He is showing that before we were Christians, our bodies were the material which sin used to enslave us. But that material has been taken away from Sin and given to God. Sin no longer controls our bodies. His control over that material has been "put out of action." Very interesting way of describing our conversion or regeneration.

Now compare verse 12:

[Bruce] **"do not allow sin to dominate your mortal bodies"**

[NAS95] **"do not let sin reign in your mortal body"**

Notice that Bruce renders the word "body" in the plural here (bodies). Instead of "reign" he uses the word "dominate" which carries the sense very well. The idea is control or domination. Since we have become Christians, we should no longer let Sin dominate and control our lives. We have a new owner and manager in our lives, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let Him dominate our lives instead.

A Look at the Two "body" Verses in Romans 6

Well, I hope that paraphrase by Bruce was helpful for you. It really helps get the context in place before we look at the individual verses.

Now we can take a closer look at Rom 6:6 and 6:12 in their context below. We need to do this so we can see what kind of "body" these two verses (6 and 12) are talking about. We will comment on these verses as we work through the context. Unfortunately, I did not get all those comments typed into this lesson outline, so you can simply look at the color-coded and highlighted text below to see the features of each verse as I point them out for us.

Pay particularly close attention to the phrases below which are **boldfaced, underlined, and color-highlighted**. The two verses which use the word "body" (6 and 12 only, but implied in verses 13 and 19 in the phrase "your members") have the phrase in **red letters**. Looking at the words and phrases that are emphasized in this context will help us determine whom Paul is addressing and what kind of "body" he is talking about (i.e., whether it is an *individual* or *collective* body).

Highlighting Color Code:

- **Yellow** -- identifies who Paul is referring to (**we, you, he, etc.**).
- **Light blue** -- marks those phrases that refer to our relationship to sin: i.e., continuing to sin, the reign of sin, dying to sin, slaves to sin, or no longer letting sin reign, etc.

The Context of Romans 6

Rom. 5:20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where **sin increased**, grace abounded all the more,

Rom. 5:21 so that, as **sin reigned in death**, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rom. 6:1 What shall **we** say then? Are **we** to **continue in sin** so that grace may increase?

Rom. 6:2 May it never be! How shall **we** who **died to sin still live in it**?

Rom. 6:3 Or do you not know that **all of us** who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized **into His death**?

Rom. 6:4 Therefore **we have been buried** with Him through baptism **into death**, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so **we too might walk** in newness of life.

Rom. 6:5 For if **we have become united** with Him in the **likeness of His death**, certainly **we shall also be** in the likeness of His resurrection,

***Rom. 6:6** knowing this, that **our** [plural] **old self** [singular] was **crucified with Him**, in order that **our** [plural] **body** [singular] **of sin** might be **done away with**, so that **we** [plural] **would no longer be slaves** [plural] **to sin**;

Ed's Comments on Rom. 6:6 *The Collective Body advocates see this usage of a plural "our" with a singular "body" as a strong argument for a collective body here in this text. However, in our previous podcast on the phrase "our lowly body" in Phil 3:21, we showed that this usage of a plural possessive personal pronoun "our" with a singular noun "body" is very common in Koine Greek of the first century, as well as in the New Testament and Paul's writings especially. It does **not** indicate a collective body at all. It simply meant that each of the persons indicated in the "our" had his own individual "body". Furthermore, the connection of the phrase "of sin" to "our body" indicates a control over our bodies by sin. It is not an adjectival use of "sin" here (as in "our sinful body"), but rather a possessive use of "sin" (as in "sin's control or rule over our bodies"). **Sin was the master** over our bodies before we became Christians, but now that we have **died to sin**, sin is no longer our master. Our bodies are no longer owned, controlled and ruled over by sin. In Christ, our bodies are no longer under the domination of, or in slavery to, Sin as our Master.*

Rom. 6:7 for **he** who has died is **freed from sin**.

Rom. 6:8 Now if **we** have **died with Christ**, **we** believe that **we** shall also live with Him,

Rom. 6:9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is **never to die again**; **death no longer is master** over Him.

Rom. 6:10 For **the death that He died**, **He** died to sin once for all; but the life that **He** lives, **He** lives to God.

Rom. 6:11 Even so **consider yourselves** [plural] to be **dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

***Rom. 6:12** ¶ Therefore **do not let sin reign** in **your** [plural] **mortal body** [singular] to obey its lusts,

Comments on Rom. 6:12 Here again we see that plural possessive personal pronoun "your" used in combination with a singular noun "mortal body". We showed in that previous podcast on Phil 3:21 that this is a very common usage in New Testament Greek, and is not referring to a collective body, but rather to each of the individuals in the "your" group having their own individual "mortal body". That individual body meaning should be very clear to us now after looking at the whole context in Bruce's translation.

***Rom. 6:13** and **do not go on presenting your** [plural] **members** [plural] to sin as **instruments** [plural] of unrighteousness; but present **yourselves** [plural] to God as those **alive from the dead**, and **your** [plural] **members** [plural] as **instruments** [plural] of righteousness to God.

Rom. 6:14 For **sin shall not be master** over **you** [plural], for **you** [plural] are not under law but under grace.

Rom. 6:15 ¶ What then? **Shall we sin** because **we** are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

Rom. 6:16 Do **you** [plural] not know that when **you** [plural] **present yourselves to someone as slaves** [plural] for obedience, **you** [plural] **are slaves** [plural] of the one whom **you** [plural] obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Rom. 6:17 But thanks be to God that though **you** [plural] were **slaves** [plural] of sin, **you** [plural] became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which **you** [plural] were committed,

Rom. 6:18 and having been **freed from sin**, **you** [plural] became **slaves** [plural] of righteousness.

***Rom. 6:19** I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of **your** [plural] flesh [singular]. For just as **you** [plural] **presented your** [plural] **members** [plural] as **slaves** [plural] to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present **your** [plural] **members** [plural] as **slaves** [plural] to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Rom. 6:20 ¶ For when **you** [plural] were **slaves** [plural] of sin, **you** [plural] were free in regard to righteousness.

Rom. 6:21 Therefore what benefit were **you** [plural] then deriving from the things of which **you** [plural] are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

Rom. 6:22 But now having been **freed from sin** and enslaved to God, **you** [plural] derive **your** [plural] benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

Rom. 6:23 For the **wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What We See in the Context

Notice that I inserted the bracketed words "singular" or "plural" after all the "you" and "your" references, as well as after some of the other key words in the context wherever the singular/plural status may have some significance for our analysis.

The sin of individual members does affect the whole body, but it is not the whole body that is doing the sinning. It is individuals who sin. It is not a collective body that is committing some kind of collective sin here, but rather a group of individuals each of

whom are individually sinning. That means that Paul is not addressing these remarks to a singular collective body, nor is he applying these teachings to a singular collective body. Instead, he is addressing a group of individual saints to each of whom these remarks apply individually (not collectively).

We absolutely must ask the Collective Body advocates the following questions:

How could a collective body [singular] be presenting "yourselves" [plural] as slaves [plural] to sin? The plural "yourselves" and "slaves" is obviously referring to individuals, not to a collective body. If Paul was referring to a singular collective body here, it would read this way: "You [singular] are presenting *yourself* [singular] as a *slave* [singular] to sin." Do you see the difference here?

Notice that all the "we" and "you" references here are plural. If Paul is addressing a collective body and talking about its continuing relationship to sin and righteousness, surely he would use singular possessive pronouns here instead of plural ones. This may not sound like a big argument for the individual body side of the debate, but we are not the ones who are claiming that the use of a plural possessive pronoun is absolutely significant and determinative of meaning. The collective body advocates are the ones who make that argument, but they don't apply it here in reference to these plural possessive pronouns "we" and "you". *They selectively pull out that argument and use it to their advantage ONLY when it helps their case, and ignore it when does not fit.*

The Collective Body advocate might point out that the group of individuals referred to here as "we" are simply individual members of a collective body of believers, and therefore it is the collective body that is really under consideration here, even though they are referred to as a group of individuals. But that is my whole point. They are not being referred to as a collective body anywhere in this context, but rather as individuals. That becomes very clear for us when we look at what Paul says about their relationship to sin. Notice all the blue highlighted phrases here. Who is it that was doing the sinning? Individuals or a collective body? Look at the yellow highlights to find the answer. It is the "we" and "you" (a plural number of individuals).

All three times that the singular form of "body" is used here in this context, it is modified by a plural possessive personal pronoun ("your" or "our").

If the "we" here in verses 1-9 and 15 is a reference to the Collective Body, then who is the "you" referring to? It is easy to understand Paul's switch between the "we" and "you" if it is talking about individual saints. But trying to make the "we" [plural] refer to a singular collective body gets confusing when Paul switches to "you" [plural].

This is not denying that the collective body may be found in other texts, even right here in Romans (e.g., Rom 12:5). But it is denying that the references to a "body" here in Romans 6:6 and 6:12 are to a collective body. The context instead very clearly shows that the body references here are to the individual bodies of the saints. And Paul's argument against continuing in sinful behavior is applied to individual Christians, not to a collective body. It is certainly possible for a collective body to commit a collective sin, but that is not what Paul is talking about here in this context.

Conclusion:

We have seen that Paul is not talking about a collective body here in these "body" references in Romans chapter 6. He certainly does refer to a group of individuals quite often here, but not as a collective. Each of the individuals in that group get those benefits or suffer those consequences individually, not just as a share in the collective.

We have looked at the broader context of Romans 5 and 6 to see what Paul is really talking about here in reference to **dying to sin** and the **body of sin**. We have noticed that it is not talking about a collective body at all, but rather talking about what happens to individuals as they initially become Christians and then persevere through **mortification** of the fleshly desires into **sanctification**.

We need to remember that *the whole motivation* for each of those individual Roman saints for persevering in their faith by **mortification** of their fleshly desires and for pursuing after **sanctification** of their individual bodies, is eliminated when the word BODY here is *collectivized*. It makes nonsense out of the moral and ethical exhortations that Paul delivers to those *individual* saints. *It means that the individual is not bound to mortify his own individual flesh and pursue after individual sanctification, since that is only for the collective body. The collective body application of these texts would decimate the moral and ethical underpinnings of Paul's whole message to the Romans.*

That is an extremely important implication that we need to keep in mind! The way we interpret these references to the body will have significant impact on the moral, ethical, and spiritual exhortations that Paul gives to those saints. *Do those exhortations only apply to the collective body, or do they apply to each and every individual Christian?* And if they do apply to each and every individual Christian, there is no way in the world the collective body can be what is under consideration here in this context of Romans 6. In order for those moral and ethical and spiritual exhortations to be applied to individuals, it means that their individual bodies have to be under consideration here.

The Collective Body interpretation of these body texts also tends to *push in the direction of universalism* (in John A. T. Robinson's and Max King's case), *as well as denial of a final eschatological resurrection of the dead out of Hades at the Parousia* (in the case of John A. T. Robinson, and possibly in some of the Collective Body advocates as well). These are serious implications which ought not to be taken lightly. We will deal with these more in future lessons, but I wanted to throw up a few yellow caution flags for all of us, so that we can be on the lookout for those problems as we examine the text.

Both *individual* and *collective* views believe in individual and collective bodies. We all agree that the concept of a collective body *presupposes* the existence of an individual body to provide the basis for the analogy. And there are a number of texts which we mutually assign to an individual or collective category. However, the big difference between the two views is regarding which texts each view assigns to the individual category, versus which texts it assigns to the collective category. Both views are

tempted to assign every eschatological resurrection text to its own particular category. But as we have seen here in the context of Romans, that simply is not possible. Neither extreme can be correct. The truth lies somewhere in the middle between the two extremes. *There are individual body texts, and there are collective body texts. And all of us have the obligation to use proper hermeneutical rules and exegetical tools to determine which category each text belongs in. The context is the most important factor in all of our analysis, and that is what we are trying to focus on here in these studies.*

We have seen in this session how important the context really is for interpreting those texts which use the word "body" here in Romans 6. We used F. F. Bruce's expanded paraphrase translation of Romans to help us get the context firmly fixed in our minds. And that is what we need to do with every one of these "body" texts, not only here in Romans, but throughout the rest of the New Testament as well. We must use the context to help us determine what kind of body is under consideration here, whether it is a collective body or individual body.

In coming sessions we will look at the rest of these thirteen "body" texts in connection with their context. In this session, we only dealt with two of them (Rom 6:6 and 6:12). We will do something similar with each of the other "body" texts in our future sessions.

Before I sign off here, I wanted to let all of our listeners know that there will NOT be a podcast next week. **Next Sunday** (Feb 2, 2014) is **SuperBowl** for the football fans here in the USA. I realize that does not mean much to our listeners outside the USA, but it is a pretty big deal for Americans. It is the end of the football season for the two major football leagues (the NFL and the AFL). The respective champions of those two leagues (Seattle versus Denver) will face each other in this one big final game. I really do not want to compete with that event for listeners, so there will definitely **NOT be a podcast** next week. This will give some of us, who may be behind in our listening, an extra week to catch up! :-)

That will do it for this time. Thanks for listening.

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