

Romans 7 – This Body of Death

Romans Series (Part 13)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Feb 16, 2014

Opening Remarks:

- A. Thanks for joining us for another study of the book of Romans from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we listened to Ken Ham explain the importance of taking Genesis 1-11 literally and historically. The way we interpret Genesis sets the foundation for interpreting the rest of the Bible, since the rest of the Bible, especially our New Testament, is based on a literal historical Genesis. If we start out wrong in Genesis, we have little hope of ending up right in Revelation. We must get the beginning right, or the ending will be wrong. If you have not heard that podcast yet, you will want to go back and listen to it. It is very foundational to understanding the rest of Scripture.
- C. This time we are going to plug back into our study of Romans at chapter 7. This chapter has been heavily discussed and debated among all Christians, including both futurists and preterists. So it should be no surprise that arriving at a good understanding of this chapter may be somewhat challenging for us. You will want to have your Bible open at Romans 7 as we study it together.
- D. Let's pray before we begin:

The Lord whom Apostle Paul served, the One who chose us and purchased us with His own blood – We echo the same question Paul asked and answered: "Who will set me free from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:24-25). We praise Your Holy Name for setting us free from our slavery to sin, death, and corruption, and for making us spiritually alive in our inner man through Your Spirit who indwells us. May Your Spirit help us as we struggle in this world to push back away from the desires of the flesh, and strive instead to live according to Your Spirit. We pray this in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus. Amen.
- E. Before we get into our lesson on Romans, I want respond to some of the feedback that I have received. A couple of listeners wondered why we are challenging some of our fellow preterists who hold to the Collective Body View of the resurrection. They are uncomfortable with this controversy being dealt with on the podcast.
 - I totally understand how uncomfortable this is. None of us like conflict. Jesus and the apostles did not like controversy either, but they were constantly having to defend the truth and correct error, whether they were comfortable with it or not.
 - That is fundamental to the work of shepherds. They constantly have to protect the sheep from predators. It is not an easy or pleasant task. No shepherd enjoys that part of his work, but he has to do it, or his flock will be destroyed.
 - There are several very important reasons why we are challenging the Collective Body View here in these podcasts on Romans. The most important reason is

- that the Collective Body View has produced **some very bad fruit** (such as *universalism, heaven now, immortal body now, perfection now or perfection never*, etc) which has taken a lot of Christians right out of the faith into *universalism, post-everything-ism, hyper-preterism, radical skepticism, or worse*.
- I would be derelict in my duties as a leader and teacher (i.e., shepherd) within the preterist movement if I did not point out this error to my fellow-Christians and warn them to back away from it. Their souls are at stake. That by itself is justification enough for us to be dealing with this controversy on the podcast.
 - Furthermore, we need to remember that the *Collective Body* advocates were the ones who started this debate by mischaracterizing the *Individual Body View* as being futurist, and also by trying to exclude the Individual Body View from the Full Preterist movement. They are trying to redefine Full Preterism so that it refers only to those who hold to the Collective Body View, so that they can hijack the Full Preterist label for their own exclusive use. So the Individual Body View has every right to defend itself against their misrepresentations and their attempts to exclude us from the Full Preterist movement.
 - It is amazing to me that no one complains about it when the Collective Body View attacks the Individual Body View in their books, podcasts, seminar speeches, and magazine articles. No one seems to be uncomfortable with that. But when the Individual Body View defends itself and exposes the fallacies of the Collective Body View, all of a sudden we get uncomfortable! Do you see the inconsistency and hypocrisy of that?
 - Moreover, Apostle Paul said that it is essential to the cause of Truth that there be debates and factions: "*For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you*" (1 Cor 11:19 NASB).
 - That is how Truth is hammered out in the minds of truth-seekers. Both sides must present their case, so that they can be compared and contrasted side by side, and be closely examined by rightly divided scripture. That is what the Bereans did, and it is why they were described as being "noble-minded" (Acts 17:10-11).
 - Only darkness prefers to hide in the shadows and refuse to have its views brought out into the light for thorough biblical examination. So, when we find ourselves uncomfortable with our opinions being brought out into the open for inspection, we need to ask ourselves why we are uncomfortable with that. *Truth has nothing to fear from an open investigation, but error surely does!*
 - Jesus did not come to make us feel comfortable with our worldly lifestyle, instead He came to challenge us with the uncomfortable truth about His Kingdom.
 - James, the brother of Jesus, reminds us that "*friendship with the world is hostility toward God*" (Jas 4:4).
 - This podcast is NOT designed to lullaby us to sleep in our blissful ignorance. Instead, it intends to wake us up and challenge us to be Bereans. So if we are uncomfortable with what is being taught here, maybe we need to "*examine ourselves*" to see if we are really truth-seekers (2 Cor 13:5; 1 Thess 5:21).
 - Too many of us are "*cast about by every wind of doctrine*" that blows through the preterist movement (Eph 4:14). We need to be people of the Book, like the Bereans were, so that we are not gullible and easily deceived, or weak and vulnerable to be taken advantage of by every false teacher that comes along.

- Some people cannot handle the Truth. They are comfort-seekers and pleasure-seekers. That is the problem with our whole western culture, and even within the Church. We are entertaining ourselves to death. That is just like the nation of Israel right before they were destroyed and sent into exile. Notice how Isaiah the prophet described the people in his day:

Is. 30:8 Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever.

Is. 30:9 **For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD;**

Is. 30:10 **Who say to the seers, "You must not see visions"; and to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions.**

Is. 30:11 **"Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."**

Is. 30:12 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Since you have **rejected this word** and have **put your trust in oppression and guile**, and have relied on them,

Is. 30:13 Therefore this iniquity will be to you like a breach **about to fall**, a bulge in a high wall, whose **collapse comes suddenly** in an instant.

- Do you see what Isaiah said about the people of his day? They told their religious leaders to stop teaching the hard truths of Scripture, and instead "*speak to them pleasant words,*" comforting words, warm and fuzzy words. They wanted their ears tickled (2 Tim 4:3), so they packed the pulpits with **sooth-sayers** who would speak **soothing** words to them, and tell them what they wanted to hear.
- But Truth has always been challenging, difficult, uncomfortable, and unpopular. And it always will be. That is why Jesus said, "*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" (Matt 7:13-14 NASB). The path to Truth is narrow, steep and difficult. Few are willing to pay the price for it. Most would rather take the easy way out and follow the popular way.
- In his parable about the pearl merchant, Jesus explained how costly and challenging the Truth really is (Matt 13:46). It is a pearl of great price, which requires us to sell everything in order to buy it. Nothing less than total surrender to Christ will gain that pearl of great price.
- Why does the majority follow error, and only a few follow truth? Because error is easy, comfortable, fun and popular ("everybody's doing it"). Error doesn't cost anything or demand any sacrifice or commitment or change in lifestyle. Error is easy to believe, pleasant and entertaining. It requires no study or critical thinking. It simply follows the herd right over the cliff to destruction.
- Apostle Peter pointed out this very danger when he said: "*...in all his letters, [Paul] speaks in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction*" (2 Pet 3:16 NASB).

- Most people would rather have their ears tickled than to diligently study the Bible and learn how to correctly interpret it. But Christ and the apostles never tried to attract comfort-seekers to the Kingdom, but rather looked for Truth-seekers like the Bereans who were willing to search the scriptures daily to see whether these things are true.
- And that is what this podcast is all about. We do not apologize for teaching the hard truths here, nor for challenging, exposing, and refuting error. Instead, we are looking for the *faithful few* who want to join with us in climbing the difficult path of *Truth* to enter the narrow gate that *leads to life*. So if you are a truth-seeker, this podcast is for you.
- With all that in mind now, let's get back into our study of Romans.

The Context of Romans 7

Before taking a closer look at these two verses in Romans 7 (verses 4 and 24), we need to get familiar with the context. We need to see how these two uses of the word "body" are related to the overall flow of thought throughout the whole context. Notice the phrases which use the word "body" are in bold red lettering. As we will see down below, the phrases "in my members" or "in our members" are references to the body as well.

NKJV

Rom. 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

Rom. 7:2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.

Rom. 7:3 So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Rom. 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law **through the body of Christ**, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

Rom. 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.

Rom. 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.

Rom. 7:7 ¶ What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "*You shall not covet.*"

Rom. 7:8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead.

Rom. 7:9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

Rom. 7:10 And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death.

Rom. 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*.

Rom. 7:12 Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Rom. 7:13 ¶ Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

Rom. 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Rom. 7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Rom. 7:16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good.

Rom. 7:17 But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Rom. 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, **in my flesh**) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find.

Rom. 7:19 For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.

Rom. 7:20 Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Rom. 7:21 ¶ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Rom. 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to **the inward man**.

Rom. 7:23 But I see another law **in my members**, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is **in my members**.

Rom. 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from **this body of death**?

Rom. 7:25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! ¶ So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with **the flesh** the law of sin.

The Word "members" (Gk *melos*)

In our previous lesson on Romans 6, we noted that the word translated "members" (Gk *melos*), as in "*members of the body*," is referring to parts of the body, regardless of whether the body is an individual body or a collective body. We pointed out that in net effect, this allows us to designate those verses which use the word "members" as *body texts*. Here is the list of those verses in the book of Romans which use the word "members": Rom 6:13; 6:19; 7:5; 7:23; 12:4–5. A couple of the standard Greek lexicons noted that when the Greek word *melos* is used in the plural (*mele*) with the genitive of person, it can be referring to the whole body as the sum of all its parts:

Bauer Danker Arndt Gingrich (BDAG) on *melos*:

"With the genitive of person, Matt 5:29f (cp. Sextus 13); Rom 6:13; 6:19; 7:5; 7:23; Jas 3:6; 4:1 (the plural in these passages may also refer to the 'body' as the sum of its parts...)"

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) on *melos*:

"In inscriptions the plural may denote **the whole body** from which the life departs at death."

These two lexicons show that these uses of "members" here in Rom 7:5 and 7:23 are also referring to the body, and are therefore useful in helping us determine the meaning of the word "body" as it is used in this 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. Truth-seekers should always make thorough use of it.

Comments on Rom 7:4

Rom. 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to **die** to the Law through **the body of Christ**, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who **was raised** from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

The reason I do not take this reference to "the body of Christ" as a collective body is because it is clearly referring to the body in which Christ died and was raised. That is

definitely referring to his individual physical body, not to the church as his body. To make this into a collective body, we would be doing what the liberal scholars have tried to do by removing the scandal of the physical resurrection of Jesus and replacing it with a resurrection of the church or some other metaphorical concept like "his memory was resurrected" in their thoughts later. That appears to be one of the reasons why John A. T. Robinson suggested a collective body application of this text, in order to downplay or remove the individual physical body of Jesus from being the body that was raised. However, the reference to Christ's individual physical body is clearly in view here, and cannot be erased or redefined by the Collective Body approach without negating the physical death and resurrection of Christ's individual physical body here in this text. We will see that more clearly as we look at the explanations in the following commentaries:

New International Biblical Commentary (NIBC)

The NIV rendering, **you also died**, is a passive in Greek, meaning "you were put to death." It connotes that **something was done to believers in Christ's death**. This is probably a "divine passive," by which reverent Jews avoided using the name of God lest they profane it. It means, "God put you to death," and it testifies to God's initiative in the work of salvation. It was God who "killed" the effects of law, sin, and death in us, and raised us in Christ to live in freedom and fruitfulness for himself.

This becomes a reality **through the body of Christ**. Several commentators take this as a reference to the familiar Pauline metaphor of the church as **the body of Christ** (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:27), or perhaps to the sacraments (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:16). But one wonders if the doctrine of the church is not premature at this juncture of the argument. It is more natural, and probably more correct, to understand **the body of Christ** as Christ's redeeming work on the cross and our identification with it; in the sense of 6:2, "We died to sin" (cf. Col. 1:22; 2:14). ...**The body of Christ** recalls a historical fact upon which redemption hangs, that through his body and the wounds inflicted on it by his enemies, Jesus "abolish[ed] in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:15).

Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC)

Death to the law is said to have occurred "through the body of Christ" (v.4). This is a reference to **the personal body of the Savior in his crucifixion**. Through the same means believers became dead both to the law and to sin. "The body of Christ" should not be interpreted as a reference to the church, since the word has not been used in the corporate, mystical sense so far in the Epistle, and when it is so used (12:4, 5) Paul brings in the human body as an analogy in order to make his meaning clear, as he had done in an earlier letter (1Cor 12:12, 13).

Calvin's Commentary on Romans (Calvin)

Christ, by the glorious victory of the cross, first triumphed over sin; and ...**we were delivered through the body of Christ — through his body as fixed to the cross. [That his crucified body is intended, is clear from what follows; for he is spoken of as having "been raised from the dead." — editor]**

Matthew Henry Commentary

...It is dead, it has lost its power; and this (v. 4) *by the body of Christ*, that is, **by the sufferings of Christ in his body, by his crucified body**, which abrogated the law, answered the demands of it, made satisfaction for our violation of it, purchased for us a covenant of grace...

Jamieson Faussett Brown (JFB)

Wherefore . . . ye also are become dead — rather, “were slain.” **to the law by the body of Christ** — **through His slain body**. The apostle here departs from his usual word “died,” using the more expressive phrase “were slain,” to make it clear that he meant their being “crucified with Christ” (as expressed in Romans 6:3-6, and Galatians 2:20).

SOMA in Biblical Theology – by Robert H. Gundry (pp. 239-240)

To Robinson, Rom 7:4 "could stand as a summary of the whole of Pauline theology: "...you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God" [Robinson, *The Body*, p. 49, cf. 47, 52].... **Nothing in the immediate context or in the entire preceding part of Romans (and Paul had not previously instructed the Roman Christians by letter or word of mouth) suggests that the "body" of Christ includes more than that individual body in which he died and rose. ...** Thus in Rom 7:4 the body of Christ is **the instrument through the death of which the believer gains freedom from the law.** ...[Paul] uses SOMA with reference to the death (but not the resurrection) of Christ because of the frequent and long-standing use of SOMA for a corpse. And, as Jewett points out, Paul wants to leave room for Christ as the living *new* master. To have written the phrase "through the death of Christ" might have led to an allegorical interpretation of his marital analogy in which Christ would be the dead *old* master [Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 300].

If Rom 7:4 summarizes Paul's somatic theology for Robinson, then Acts 9:4-5; 22:7-8; 26:14-15 supplies its fountainhead: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?...I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" [Robinson, *The Body*, 57-58]. But if the words Paul heard on the road to Damascus are the source for the concept of the Church as Christ's Body, why does that concept not appear very early in Pauline literature? Maybe the deduction was slow in coming. Even so, it is a long step from persecution of Christ in Christians to a sacramental literalism in which Christians *are* the physical body of Christ. [Gundry, *SOMA*, 239-240]

Note the logic here in Rom 7:4 – If the "you" here is the collective body, and the "body of Christ" is also the collective body, then we have the collective body being made to die to law through the death of the collective body itself. Do you see the absurdity of that?

So how in the world can the CBV guys say that this is referring to the collective body of Christ? Well, their paradigm needs it to be a collective body, so they just assert that it is. For instance, in a sermon on Rom 7:4 by one of the collective body advocates, he said that the "body" of Christ that is mentioned here "can be referring to the [individual] bodily death of Jesus ... or it can be referring to our [collective] solidarity with the Messiah in

His death, or both." In other words, take your pick (cafeteria-style). It can mean anything we want it to mean, or whatever our paradigm needs it to mean. He does not stop to prove exegetically and contextually that it is referring to a collective body, he just claims it, and then inserts that meaning into the context, regardless of whether it fits or not.

Comments on Rom 7:24

Rom. 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from **this body of death**?

In the Greek this literally reads, "the body of the death, *this one*." Notice the *demonstrative* pronoun ("this one") added at the end of the phrase for emphasis. It is as if Paul was pointing with his finger to his own physical body when he says "this one." Which body was subject to death? Paul *demonstratively* answers, "this one," the one in which his soul or spirit (his "inner man") was dwelling.

The key to seeing this reference to "the body" as an individual usage is found in the surrounding verses of the context, which we will look at shortly. In brief, this is simply another example of the possessive (not descriptive) use of the phrase "of this death" like we saw in Rom 6:6 where it referred to our bodies being possessed or controlled or enslaved by Sin (personified). Here Paul is talking about "Death" (personified) owning or controlling his body, because of his enslavement to Sin (personified). In the context he is merely restating the gospel, when he points out that Christ died on our behalf, in order to redeem us back from our enslavement to Sin and Death. Because of sin, Paul's body was owned by Death and doomed to die, not only a physical death (the first death), but eternal death (the second death) as well. But Jesus redeemed him (and all of the elect saints) from Death's grip so that physical death no longer had any power to push us into **eternal death**. We still have to die physically, but that physical death no longer has any power to harm us in the afterlife.

Verse 25 makes the collective body interpretation of verse 24 impossible, when it says that "with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." We might ask, what is the "mind" of a collective body (a Nirvana-like "collective consciousness" of some kind?), and how is it distinguished from the "flesh" of that same collective body? And what in the world is this "flesh" of a collective body (some kind of borg-like body)? Do you see the utter absurdity of taking this "body" here in verse 24 as a reference to the collective body of the Church? Not only does it make verse 25 meaningless, but it renders the rest of the preceding context of chapter 7 totally unintelligible as well.

The only way the Collective Body advocates can get away with interpreting verse 24 in a collective sense is by lifting it out of its context and bringing other spoof-texts alongside it to supply the collective body application. Left in its context, the word "body" in verse 24 can only mean Paul's own individual body that had "bear[ed] fruit to death" (v. 5), was "killed" by sin (vv. 9-11), "sold under sin" (v. 14) and "in captivity to the law of sin" (v. 23). That is why Paul, like all sinners, needed to be "deliver[ed] from this body of death" (v. 24). Sin had killed his body, but Jesus had delivered him from that subjection to death by offering His own body for us on the Cross (vv. 4-6). Using a different analogy, vv. 4-6 explain how this deliverance from death was accomplished. Paul and

all saints were delivered from their subjection to death through the death of Christ's individual physical body on the Cross on their behalf. The death of Christ on the Cross delivered us from the Death that our bodies were subject to because of sin.

Conclusion:

We have shown that the collective body application of these "body" texts here in Romans 7 simply does not make good sense in this context.

One of the devastating implications of the collective body approach to these references to the "body" here in Romans is that all of the moral, ethical, and spiritual exhortations that Paul provides are disconnected from the individual Christian and reapplied to the collective body. For instance, Paul refers to dying to sin (vv. 4-6), "serving in newness of the Spirit" (v. 6), so that "sin would become utterly sinful to us" (v. 13), and we would no longer "practice the evil that we did when we were in the flesh" (vv. 15-20), but now "serve the Law of God rather than serving the law of sin and death" (v. 25). If the "body" under consideration here is a collective body, then these moral, ethical, and spiritual exhortations are not applicable to individuals. In that case, we would have to ask, "How would these exhortations against sinning apply to collective sins of a collective body?" "*Absurd*," you say? Exactly.

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** in 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 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 decimates the moral and ethical underpinnings of Paul's whole message to the Romans.

This may explain why some of the adherents to the Collective Body View have produced such bad fruit in their lives by continuing to engage in a sinful fleshly lifestyle, instead of pursuing mortification of their sin and sanctification of their bodies. In contrast, the Individual Body View accepts and applies these moral, ethical and spiritual exhortations to our individual lives.

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). These are serious implications which ought to make us back away from the Collective Body View.

In coming sessions we will look at more of these "body" texts in the book of Romans. And I suspect that all of us are already beginning to see how using the context is the best method of determining the meaning of each of these "body" references. This should get easier for us as we get more skilled at examining the context.

Well, that will do it for this time. Thank you so much for listening.

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