

# The Body of Death

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are focusing on the battle that is being fought all around us and even inside us.

! And that's the battle of sin and with sin. We speak often in terms of the war against the world, the devil and the flesh.

And as we near the end of our study, we're examining the most intense part of that war, which deals with our flesh. Now, why is that important? Well, we go back to the beginning of our study in September of 2021.

If you get a copy of tonight's lesson, scratch through the last two there and put one. Where we read this passage of Scripture, Pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

That's in Hebrews 12, 14. And as we finished our lesson last week, we left the Apostle Paul with this troubling statement of inspired Scripture, Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death.

[ 1 : 27 ] And we concluded our lesson last week with three questions. Question one was, how or why does Paul declare himself to be a wretched man?

Question two, if Paul is a wretched man, what am I? And then question three, what is this body of death clinging to him? Well, in answer to the first question, Paul saw in himself the sin that was pervasive in his life.

This is the guy we would put at the very pinnacle of a Christian brother, but sin to... Paul's thinking was everywhere within him.

He was doing the very things he did not want to do. He was leaving undone the very things he wanted to do and he knew he should be doing them. But he didn't do them. The second question is easy to answer.

Paul was the chief of sinners until I came along. I can easily cry out, what a wretched man am I? The answer to the third question, though, is a bit more involved.

[ 2 : 50 ] What was this body of death clinging to Paul? And if it's clinging to Paul, is it clinging to us?

And may I say, it is the same body of death that clings to every true believer that lives out their lives in unredeemed flesh. We can and will answer that question using both history and Scripture.

And actually, we can begin by at least telling a story out of the Gospel of John, chapter 11. When the Lord was on earth, He actually had a best friend.

He wasn't one of the disciples. His best friend was a man by the name of Lazarus. And He had a couple of sisters.

You remember Martha and Mary. And when the Lord and disciples were way off, a messenger sent by the two sisters found the Lord and arrived to tell Him that His good friend was very sick.

[ 4 : 03 ] They feared that He was dying. I think everybody that heard that, the disciples, the messenger, or whatever, just thought Jesus would immediately take off for Bethany, which is a suburb to Jerusalem, about five miles away.

But instead of immediately hastening to the side of Lazarus, the Lord delayed for a couple of days. He just hung around.

And then He started the trip to Bethany where the family resided. When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

It's always very significant to me when I read that. In the very first lesson I ever taught at Highland Park, which was about 1980, 81, I remember Jan Hefner called me and asked if I would fill in because the teacher wasn't there and the fill-in they picked wasn't in, so I said, okay, I'll try.

But I began to research for that lesson and I don't know what I was looking at. But in my research, I discovered that there was a tradition in Israel that after burial, the soul of the departed lingered for four days near the tomb.

[ 5 : 44 ] I didn't know that. And there was always this hope that the body could reunite with the soul or the soul with the body within that four-day time frame.

But if after four days it didn't, then they had no hope. Well, Jesus arrived well into the fourth day and clearly if they were even thinking of that tradition, they may not have been, it wasn't going to help. Of course, there's nothing in Scripture that substantiates this. I did find it interesting that there was apparently a sliver of hope, but by the time Jesus arised all hope was gone.

I have no idea if Mary and Martha bought into that. I do believe, though, that the Lord purposely delayed His arrival I think He wanted Lazarus good and dead.

Of course, we know the reason for that. Mary and Martha knew Jesus could heal. There was no question in their minds. But according to John 11, they were less sure about whether He could raise the dead.

[ 7 : 04 ] That may be, you know, biting off more than you can chew. I remember when one of the leading charismatics talked about raising people from the dead.

I won't mention his name, but when Noel Roberts said that, someone asked for, you know, some names and addresses and phone numbers. They wanted to talk to those people and he wouldn't provide them.

And finally, he had to admit that that hadn't really happened. But he still got money based on it. But I don't think there's any question that Mary and Martha were hoping beyond hope that Jesus would arrive before Lazarus died.

But Jesus waited until He was not only dead, but He was very dead. And actually, we now know in this way He could display to them the full scope of His divine power.

Jesus went to Lazarus' grave. He told the mourners to remove the stone that was over the grave. Jews did not embalm.

[ 8 : 21 ] That was Egypt. The Jewish people didn't embalm. And Martha, who was at the tomb at the time, was horrified at the thought that the grave was going to be opened.

She just was alarmed that this was going to happen and she cried out in perfect King James English, Lord, by this time He stinketh.

He's been dead four days. Now, I don't want to hit this too hard and I'm sure there's many of you in here that have experienced this, but I've experienced that smell many times.

Never forget it. Never. And that's enough on that. But Martha objected.

He's going to really smell. And Jesus ignored her concern. And we know the story. He cries out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out or come forth.

[ 9 : 37 ] And you know the old story. He had to put Lazarus in there so every dead person on planet Earth didn't come out when He said, come forth. That day's coming.

But He specified Lazarus. I'm glad there weren't four or five guys named Lazarus in that area. The sight the mourners saw was Lazarus bound hand and foot wrappings on His face.

He was like a mummy hopping around when He came out of the grave. And Jesus gave the command, loose Him and let Him go. Just an amazing thing.

And let me add something as an aside. It's not in your notes, but you know there were some Pharisees in the crowd. And they went back and told the high priests and the leaders of the Sanhedrin what they had seen.

And so they condemned Jesus to death. Now you think about the depravity of man. They never doubted He raised Lazarus from the dead.

[ 10 : 48 ] But the high priest said if we don't kill Him, the Romans are going to take away our positions. Just amazing. So now we have somewhat of a dilemma.

Lazarus was covered in stinking grave clothes. They were filled with decay and stench of decomposition.

Death clung to him. It did stink. And he would be unable to express the freshness of his new life. He's going to have to go clean up.

Now, where am I headed with all this? Lazarus provided for us a graphic illustration of our own predicament.

Romans 6.4 Romans 6.4 Romans 6.4 Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too we may walk in newness of life.

[12:07] And I heard that for 17 years from Dr. McBride when he would baptize somebody in one form or another. We died with Christ and we've been raised with Christ.

We joyfully agree with the inner law of God and the inner man. We are new creations but we are covered by the remnants of our fallenness and so like the King James Version we stinketh. It's as if we're bound in our own grave clothes. That's where we find ourselves as believers. But the reality is that our spiritual condition is even more difficult than the situation Lazarus was in. Lazarus' rags came off rather easily and immediately and completely with him it was just a linen shroud and once it was removed and discarded and he put on a little band roll on whatever and the stench was gone and the corruption of death no longer was clinging to him. Well, our predicament cannot be so easily resolved. Why is that? Because at rebirth we don't merely have a linen shroud covering our body as did Lazarus.

[13:43] We have a carcass of unredeemed flesh to contend with. And Paul verifies this in the seventh chapter of Romans beginning in verse 21.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me. The great apostle Paul the one who wants to do good.

For I joyfully agree with the law of God in the inner person but I see a different law in the parts of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin the law which is in my body's parts.

That's where he cries out wretched man that I am who will set me free from the body of this death. And again we appeal to the passage we just talked about in John's gospel.

The Romans did not create capital punishment. but they did perfect it. In the Roman Empire when someone received a sentence of death it was carried out.

[15:07] The Roman track record for this was 100%. And Roman law had a special little device to make sure it was carried out if the Roman soldiers didn't carry it out they were executed.

so they were highly motivated to make sure the deceased was really dead. It has been reported going back centuries that one particularly cruel method of execution was to have the body of the victim tied to the body of the convicted murderer and he had to live with that body until the corruption finally killed him.

If this is in fact the words of Paul if in fact this is true the words of Paul wanting to be set free from the body of death makes a lot of sense.

Undoubtedly Paul who was a Roman citizen by the way a Jew but a Roman citizen raised in the Roman Empire he had undoubtedly if this was true had seen this.

He had seen a guy walking around with a body strapped and if he did he had no doubt seen those corpses tied to the backs of convicted people.

[16:35] I think also this is what John Bunyan was alluding to in Pilgrim's Progress Pilgrim set out so he could somehow find someone that could remove this mass that was tied to his back and weighting him down.

Of course that mass represented his accumulated sins. I found a reference to this sermon by one William Emmons just so you know I have no idea who he is but he said this one of the most brutal and deadly practices of the Roman Empire was its treatment of condemned criminals.

Those who had committed crimes against the Empire were brutalized by being nailed naked to a cross for all to ridicule, spit on, and mock. However, there was still one punishment which was reserved for the worst of the worst which is almost unimaginable for us to think about and those people were especially hated for their crimes and the sentence that was carried around was referred to as dead weight.

That makes sense, doesn't it? You got a lot of weight on you, yeah, and it's dead. The term has come down through the generations to us it means to carry that which has no benefit or purpose and actually causes harm.

However, to the Romans, the term referred to the practice of strapping a dead body to the criminal. They were forced to live out their last few weeks in a walking punishment by carrying a maggot infested corpse wrapped to their bare back.

[18:17] During the process of decomposition, it slowly leaked poisons into the criminal, making him sicker and sicker until he finally died a very slow, painful, stench-filled!

death. Pastor Rehman continues, Why would I bring up such a disgusting thing? Because I meet people almost daily who unknowingly have dead weight strapped to their backs and for them it's a

normal way of life.

I know those who carry bitterness, unforgiveness, resentment, and a host of other rotting attitudes around all because of something someone said or did a month or ten years or half a lifetime ago. Over time these things have leaked their poison into them and I watch in unbelief as it bends them over in isolated pain and unsatisfied anger.

Now in the spirit of truthfulness there may be a problem with all this. I don't know if there is. But there are no ancient writings that refer to that form of execution.

[ 19 : 20 ] it is known that Roman citizens and Paul was one of those were very rarely sentenced to death although he was one of those by the emperor himself but actually by law a Roman citizen could be condemned to death only if he committed treason or patricide killing your parents or one of your parents.

Furthermore in all instances a Roman citizen was not supposed to be crucified only the emperor could step in. Remember when Paul said I appeal to Caesar only that appeal went directly to Caesar.

There is no reference to this form of punishment in Edward Gibbons multi-volume history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. I still choose to believe it because of Paul's need to rid himself of the body of death.

In Romans chapter 8 Paul made reference to believers groaning under the weight until the redemption of our bodies. Until our bodies are redeemed we wait for full and glorious deliverance from sin's presence.

Sin's mastery has been broken. Sin's penalty has been canceled. Having been satisfied by Christ, sin's power has been broken. sin's presence is still a reality.

[ 20 : 54 ] We are still anticipating the time when our bodies will be freed from the body of sin that so impacts us. We need to discuss another important point.

Some people and some denominations teach that Romans 5 and 6 had to be Paul describing his life prior to conversion.

They see no possibility of simul justice et peccator or simultaneously just and a sinner in operation. They argued that this is simply not possible.

One such theologian had this to say, no limit can be put on the degree of perfection attainable in this life. doing so would be to limit the grace of God.

Clearly the only limitation as to how holy you could be is that which you impose on your own free will. I don't say I agree with this guy, I'm just reading a quote here. So you could actually be perfect if you could amp up your will.

[ 22 : 00 ] Then there's no limit. I dare say for us in here that sounds like a pretty rare position to take, but it's really not rare at all.

There are denominations that teach entire sanctification or perfection and this has caused and continues to cause a schism in the body of Christ that's led to a number of problems.

Some of the great heroes of the church have had to deal with that false theology. The great reformer Martin Luther had this to deal with and did so. He called the teaching a perfectionism a false philosophy.

And then I got this quote from Luther. They teach that sin is entirely destroyed by baptism or repentance and so regarded as absurd that the apostle should here confess sin dwells in me.

As a converted or spiritual man they say he could no longer have any sin in him. Therefore they argue he speaks of himself as a carnal unconverted man. To which Luther says but sin does remain in the spiritual man.

[ 23 : 14 ] You know I think it's easily resolved. 1 John chapter 1 If you say you're without sin you make God a liar and the truth's not in you. That's pretty plain to me.

Another great theologian that disputed the teaching of perfectionism was B.B. Warfield. Benjamin Breckenridge that was his mom's maiden name Warfield who lived from 1851 to 1921 was professor of theology at Princeton Seminary when it actually stood for something.

And then from 1887 he was a professor there from 1887 to 1921. He traced the modern influence of perfectionism back to John Wesley the founder of the Methodist Church.

I found this quote from a sermon by John MacArthur if you disagree with it I've got John's direct line number it was John Wesley the English pastor who infected the world with this idea of entire sanctification and by the way there was no element in all his teachings which afforded him greater

satisfaction and there's no element in Wesleyan teaching that is more lauded by his followers than this notion of entire sanctification Christian perfectionism holiness and this is actually what gave life to what we now call the holiness movement there are many denominations many forms of this viewpoint it worst up on the church shore in various forms but it is one consistent fundamental and this is it the essential core of this notion that repeats itself in diverse movements is this justification and sanctification are entirely separate events they are divided from each other justification happens at some point in time when you believe in

Jesus Christ in a gospel way sanctification happens at some later time when you ramp up your free will to totally consecrate yourself to God or therefore be baptized by the Holy Spirit which then makes you perfect sanctification then is obtained like justification it is some momentary esoteric elevated spiritually heightened encounter with God by faith at a later time and it's disconnected from justification sanctification is referred to by the people that believe in that the second act of grace it is like salvation by faith like salvation immediate and like salvation complete this sanctification brings complete freedom from sins now here's the this is MacArthur now here's the bad news in their theology you can lose both that is a problem in their theological system you can lose your justification and your sanctification you attain to justification by your free will and you attain to sanctification by your free will and if your will lapses and you stumble into sin and unbelief you can lose your sanctification and you can lose your justification so while they are by faith immediate and complete they are temporary neither one is stable neither one is permanent both can be lost and then again instantaneously recovered that would be a very difficult way to live the Christian life trying with all your might on the one hand to hold on to your justification and with the other hand to hang on to your sanctification how can anybody who is a true

[ 27 : 07 ] Christian and knows his or her own heart ever think that they had reached entire sanctification or as many Wesleyan holiness people call it eradication of the sin nature I tell you how they do it they have to redefine sin they have to downgrade holiness and redefine sin end of the quote from MacArthur some denominations that hold to certain forms of the downgrade are Methodist salvation army Nazarenes other many different Wesleyan groups most Pentecostal groups many charismatic churches also hold to the doctrine of perfectionism and that's led to a lot of problems and to a lot of heartbreak for many people I asked my dear brothers we get into it a little bit they usually lead off by yeah you're one of those

Baptist guys believing once saved always saved and the chief proponent of that I won't tell you his name you probably know him he's a good guy and I said I don't believe that and the mouth hung open you know I said I believe in once truly saved always saved and he goes well you know I think I believe in that I said you better one of the great scandals of the downgrade movement was perpetrated by Charles Finney a name some of y'all may be familiar with another name you might be familiar with is Scott Bates Scott had to take a class out at Wesleyan on the life of Charles Finney and he said he's held in the highest regard we're going to look at Finney and talk about him a little bit next time because he was at the center of the downgrade movement he was at the very heart of that downgrade movement and then to kind of maybe lure you back next time I also will cover at least briefly how some of the downgrade theology found its way into southern baptist life for a little time for a brief period of time hopefully it's gone away but we'll talk about that as well it'll be an interesting time and we'll spread together