

**"How free are you?"**

**Romans 7:24 NASB**

**"Wretched man that I am!**

**Who will set me from the body of this death?"**

**These sentences sound dismal, don't they?**

**The Living Bible translates them:**

**"Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in. Who will free me from this deadly lower nature?"**

**Today's English Version renders:**

**"What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?"**

**Whatever the version, you sense Paul's despair.**

**"What did Paul mean when he wrote this?"**

**Did he refer to the fact of his dying some day?**

**One day in a Los Angeles hardware store I stood near a woman who brought back some long-life light bulbs.**

**"I thought they would last forever," she complained.**

The store owner abruptly replied:

**"Nothing lasts forever, lady. Not even you!"**

The stunned woman sobbed,

**"I WISH YOU HADN'T TOLD ME THAT. I JUST LOST MY GRANDMOTHER."**

**We're all mortals.**

- **That's a small part of what Paul meant.**
- **Yet he evidently referred to certain situations and events prior to death.**

**Something additional caused him to write:**

**"What a wretched man I am!"**

**Did he refer to his own body's wretchedness?**

**As I waited for a ride at the Hollywood YMCA one day, two men arrived.**

**One of them walked into the Y entrance.**

The other couldn't walk; his disfigured body kept him in a wheelchair.

After we chatted a while, I'm not sure

what occasioned the comment, but he said, Old Hollywood Y

**"Look at me. I'm ugly."**

**Ever thinking I need a quick retort and often deeply regretting what I say, I blurted:**

**"Aw, I've seen a lot of guys uglier than you!"**

**Did Paul refer to his own unattractive body?**

**Scholars have surmised that Paul suffered all sorts of physical ailments and disfigurements.**

**Their guesses range from blindness to bow legs.**

- **The people of Lystra nearly succeeded in trying to stone him to death.**



Old Hollywood Y

**Imagine the permanent scars that marked Paul's body.**

- His back probably looked hideous from the beatings he took.
- Five different times authorities flogged him. Each flogging included 39 strikes with a cat-o-nine-tails whip. His aching, battered, scarred body could have been a small part of what Paul meant.

**But not the whole of his reference.**

**I don't think Paul referred only to himself.**

**When Paul wrote:**

**"Who will set me from the body of this death?"**

- **I think Paul described every human being from the ugliest to the most beautiful, from the homeliest to the handsomest.**
- **He referred to the man confined to a wheelchair at the Hollywood YMCA and the most attractive actors and best built athletes.**
- **He included every person who has ever lived and also yet to be born.**

**I think Paul had in mind the difficulty we all have trying to live righteously.**

**Every person from the age of ten years up through a 120 knows how hard it is to always do the right thing.**

Look at the human record.

As we noted last week, the first human beings discovered how hard it is to do good.

**They couldn't keep their one simple law:**

**"Don't touch that tree!"**

Adam and Eve couldn't keep their hands off of it.

- **Ever since, we've had a hard time keeping our hands and eyes off of forbidden things.**

**You know the struggle of resisting some urges.**

- **Each of us has different sets of temptations.**

- **Certain people find it hard to resist liquor.**

Loved ones try to hide alcohol from them; their efforts are often in vain.



- **I've had almost no desire to drink—ever.** But I deal with my own sets of temptations, so I understand how hard it is for some people to give up alcohol even though it harms their bodies and mars relationships with loved ones.
- **We all know sin in some forms.**

We know how sin affects us and loved ones; still, we get entangled in it.

**This sin snare is part of what Paul meant:**

**“Wretched man that I am!**

**Who will set me from the body of this death?”**

**Yet another reality staggered Paul.**

**He knew and understood another fact.**

**Many modern people appear not to get it.**

What Paul well understood but what most 21<sup>st</sup> century people don't grasp is that laws against evil don't make us want to do right.

Perfect laws don't create faultless societies.

**Earlier in chapter 7, Paul talked about law's failure to create flawless people.**

**God gave Paul's forefathers and mothers excellent commandments--the Law of Moses.**

**“Do the works of the law and you will live.”**

The Law of Moses was as near perfect as a set of laws and ordinances could get.

- It was fair.
  - The rules applied equally to everyone.
- They created order and peace.
  - Helped people avoid stress.
- Avoided pandemics.

- Should have virtually eliminated crime.
- Taxes weren't a burden.
- Welfare laws helped the helpless, but discouraged folks from becoming dependent.

**Much of English common law and many laws in this country were based on that superior law.**

**The Law of Moses was nearly perfect.**

**Good, fair laws equally applied should make people better, shouldn't they?**

- Perfect laws should create perfect societies.
- Perfect laws should make everyone happy.
- Perfect laws should help all citizens live in peace and security.

**Yet the excellent Law of Moses didn't work.**

- That's why Paul cried,  
**“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” NIV**

**Paul knew a fact most modern folks including college professors and the 535 or so members of the US Senate and House seem clueless.**

- Neither do the legislatures nor governors of any other state.
- It escapes most news people.



- It's not clear to the majority of clergy people.

**Extensive laws don't create perfect societies.**

**Perfect laws don't work.**

**"Why not?"** you ask.

**A perversity of pride in people hinders and restricts perfect laws from working.**

That's why Paul exclaimed, **"wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?"**

**"Our ancestors got a cool law and it didn't work! What can we do?"**

**"Bob, are you sure about this?"** you wonder.

**Absolutely.**

A few examples of our perversity should suffice.

Thinking we ourselves are special, we tend to exclude or exempt ourselves from laws.

**Examples:**

- A few years ago, the U.S. Congress passed and the President signed a highly touted Campaign Finance Reform law.

**But guess what?**

**That law didn't go into effect until after the next election.**

That meant that many of the current officeholders didn't have to abide by the law until after they were reelected.

**In the meantime lawyers and certain politicians would figure out how to circumvent that law.**

**Some consider themselves physically and/or intellectually superior.**

**A few decades ago, one of my contemporaries commented on his ability to take aspirin.**

In essence he said: "Instructions on aspirin bottles say you should take two aspirin every few hours. But I'm tough. I played high school football. I take four at a time."

After this fellow my age died unexpectedly a few years later, I wondered if he made too many exceptions in taking medications.

**We easily fall for the "special person" lie, don't we?**

**"The speed limit is 55, but there's no one around and I'm an excellent driver . . ."**

**Pride perversity often deceives us, doesn't it?**

**Human pride might be the most serious and destructive, yet most unrecognizable sins of all.**



There's an old fable about a frog that needed to travel across a huge lake. He could swim of course, but the lake was too wide for even a frog to swim. He became friends with some geese who told him that they could get him easily across. They would fly side by side holding a stick in their beaks. He needed only to bite onto the stick and hold on while the geese flew across.

Exhilarated by the sights he saw, he was looking down on all the frogs along the lake below. Pride filled his head. Before he could catch himself he said,

"Look at me! I can fly

y

y

y . . ."



**The problem isn't having enough laws.**

- There are so many laws on the books, most of them are forgotten.
  - Few want to keep the others.
- Yet governments and church leaders keep making more laws.

**The answer isn't to make more laws.**

Some laws are necessary, but they don't make perfect societies.

**We must admit our perversity,  
confess it, and ask God to help us change.  
We repent of our pride and wrongdoing.**

**We accept Jesus as our Savior and  
make him our Lord.**

We die as adults to our old perverse way of life and become one with Christ in baptism.

**Romans six explains:**

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."<sup>1</sup>

- **Baptism is our first death.**
  - **Coming out of baptism's water is our first resurrection.**
- **That's why Revelation 20:6 NIV reads:**

"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:4 NIV



By living according to Jesus' pattern and loving our enemies as he loved, we reign with Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

**As Colossians 3:1-4 (NIV) states:**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God . . . For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

**Paul once lived a stubborn, proud, perverse life but died to himself by being baptized, raised with Christ, and then doing Christ's will.**

He joyfully learned:

**"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death."**<sup>2</sup>

**No other life-solution works or even exists.**

The more we try other ways the greater messes we make.

**Faith in Christ and his way leads us to victory over our fears and foibles.**

**That's why Paul wrote in Romans 6:25:**

**"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord**



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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:1, 2 NIV.