

Man: Wretched or Wonderful?

by Bill Volkman

Most of us have heard the oft-used, pathetic excuse, *"I'm only human."* Not only is this statement inaccurate, it also reflects the typical negative attitude that most Christians have about their humanity. Few have come to see that our humanity is really very wonderful. Whether we see our humanity as *wretched* or *wonderful* is dependent on our focus. Do you have a Romans 7 focus of yourself, or a Romans 8 focus?

Near the close of Romans 7 Paul says, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?"* Then Chapter 8 opens with the *wonderful* statement, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* How can we account for Paul's move from the frustration and struggle of chapter 7 to the freedom and *"no condemnation"* of chapter 8?

To say "Christ is the answer" is an oversimplification, because millions who are born again still live with death-producing guilt and fear. Most born again Christians continue to be plagued with negative feelings about their humanity, even though they have a wonderful sense of peace with God regarding their destiny in the hereafter. So what can we say to ourselves and others to bring a *current* sense of wholeness, self-worth and creative freedom? What is it that will trigger good feelings about our Personal humanity, even though temptations and negative inclinations continue?

For me, the answer lies in Romans 8:2, *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death"* Along with millions of others, my candidate for the Bible verse that best gives the basis for the forgiveness of sin is John 3:16; but my favorite when it comes to the basis of day-by-day liberated living is Romans 8:2.

As long as we see the two laws (union life and human inclinations) as being in a continuing struggle within us, as long as we assume that the existence of the two laws is proof that we are "stuck" with two competing natures, we will continue to live in the Romans 7 frustration. We will repeat endlessly: *"On the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin"* (7:25). When will we see that the temptations and negative desires and inclinations of our humanity are not properly labeled a "nature"? We *"were by nature children of disobedience"* (Eph. 2:3), but now we are by nature children of obedience. Yes, obedience is now our very nature, for we have the Spirit of Christ, irrespective of some negative human inclinations and tendencies. Do not confuse your true nature with a human tendency. This is why Jesus said, *"Do not judge according to appearances [or human feelings], but judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). Barnacles on the hull of a ship do not affect the inner cargo.

The law of sin and death that reigns in the lives of those who have not yet come to a point of repentance is no longer a reigning law in our lives. Now when negative humanity surfaces we see it for what it really is God's way of reminding us of who we really are, His precious assets. Since we are *"joined to another"* (Rom. 7:4), we *"have been released from the law"* (7:6). The law that once condemned us is now just a wonderful reminder of who we are in Christ.

The two laws of Romans 8 have an enlightening parallel in two physical laws: the law of gravity and the law of aerodynamics. Have you ever sat in a Boeing 747 before take-off and thought, *"How will this monster get off the ground?"* Conscious of the law of gravity, we wonder how four jet engines will ever enable thousands of tons to fly across the continent. But we know the law of aerodynamics has set the plane free from the law of gravity.

The Wright Brothers knew they could fly long before they proved it by their first successful flight at Kittyhawk. While others continued to say that the law of gravity made flight impossible, Orville and Wilbur had concluded that because of another law, the law of aerodynamics, flight was possible. The law of aerodynamics *had not negated* the law of gravity, but it *had set them free* from the law of gravity. Even more amazing, they had come to understand that the very law that had been the seeming curse — the law of gravity — was actually an important factor in the operation of the over-riding law of aerodynamics. Thrust alone, without the gravity factor, would have made directional flight and landing impossible. The passenger and military jets of today all are continuing proof that we can be free of gravity even though the law is still very much operative.

Since the Wright Brothers were not intimidated by the concept of the law of gravity, they could creatively *use* the law of gravity as part of the greater law of aerodynamics. When we finally are no longer intimidated and condemned by our humanity, we will be able to use our human desires and temptations, and even our “falls,” as stepping stones to new creativity in everyday life situations.

Remember, God has spoken: “*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*” When Romans 7 feelings of “*wretched man that I am*” overtake you, allow such feelings to put you back into the “*no condemnation*” focus of Romans 8. Move from the common self-appraisal of condemnation to one of no-condemnation. Realize that humanity is no longer a liability; it is an asset. Now that we know who we are, humanity is no longer wretched; our humanity is wonderful.