



# THE “WRETCHED MAN” OF ROMANS 7

A Discourse Analysis of Romans 7:13-25

M. V. Pereira

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# The “Wretched Man” of Romans 7

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Romans 7:13-25

## *Abstract*

Few matters weigh more heavily upon the heart of those who love the Lord than their own offenses against Him. Love grieves over all that hinders its full and consistent devotion, fellowship, and delight. God’s love to the saint induces the saint’s love to God (1 John 4:19). And it has been granted to the saint to know instinctively that if one loves the Lord, he will indeed keep His commandments (John 14:15). Yet, the more closely the humble saint walks with the Holy Savior, the more distant he sometimes feels (1 Timothy 1:15). Sin becomes exceedingly sinful and an increasing affliction to his existence in the tension of an already-not-yet salvation. He yearns to be free from every wandering thought, practical inconsistency, and spiritual failure. He delights in the prospect of unfailing devotion, a constantly pure and holy heart, and unhindered, unswerving communion with his Lord and Savior. Yet, he still sins. All who love the Lord, persevering in a cursed world while inwardly groaning for final and full redemption know these sentiments all too well. But however true and resonating they may be, they do not come from Romans 7. The conflict described there is furnished to illustrate the absurdity of a New Covenant saint seeking to grow in practical righteousness through obedience to the Old Covenant law. It is a demonstration of the frustration and futility of striving in one’s own strength against the law of sin and death—even with the holy and good law of God.

## A CLASSIC CONTROVERSY

The seventh chapter of Romans has a unique legacy of interpretation. It has been analyzed, dissected, and studied more than most. Yet curiously, some of the ablest expositors (those who explain a text) have come to divergent conclusions. The differences are not little. They have to do with the identity of the “I” in 7:14-25 and, perhaps more importantly, the central meaning of the passage. While some features of the chapter have enjoyed wider agreement, there remain obvious and significant interpretive difficulties.

There is universal agreement only on one point, namely that this is a highly controversial passage. It is controversial in the sense that the interpretation is debated or disputed, not in the sense that the theology of either of the two major views is in question. In fact, expositors who maintain that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are unanimous in affirming that the apostle Paul did, and likewise every saint does, actively struggle with an internal sin-principle until their glorification.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine remains undisputed, regardless of the interpretation of Romans 7:14-25. Nonetheless, the interpretive challenge is significant and is not without consequence.

The passage is a classic exegetical battleground hosting a justly famous controversy.<sup>2</sup> One theologian says it “is among the most problematic sections of Romans and the most intellectually straining passage of the entire Pauline corpus.”<sup>3</sup> An exegetical scholar writes, “No part of Romans, in fact, has been the object of so much scrutiny and the source of so much confusion as what Paul writes in 7:14–25.”<sup>4</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones said, “This chapter is one of the most controversial in the Bible.” Later, he aptly remarked,

In this verse [7:14] we come to the beginning of this most interesting section in this 7th chapter of this Epistle; indeed we come to what is beyond any doubt the most famous and best-known section in the entire Epistle. There is no section, certainly, which has so frequently led to debate and disputation and, unfortunately, one must add, even wrangling and a display of a spirit far removed from that which is taught in the New Testament. This is a subject, therefore, which we approach, I trust, with a great deal of caution, and certainly with a maximum of humility.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, may the nature and manner of our study demonstrate diligence thoroughly clothed in humility. May we seek more to please Christ than prove a point or score in a debate.

While this paper does not presume to neatly resolve millennia of expositional disagreement, it does seek to humbly stimulate a deeper appreciation and commitment to reading a text in its context, and carefully following its line of argumentation while resisting the tendency to impose meaning on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology*, 274. Similarly, “Advocates of both positions agree that (1) Christians still struggle with sin through their whole lives (see Gal. 5:17; 1 John 1:8–9); and (2) Christians can and should grow in sanctification throughout their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (Rom. 8:2, 4, 9, 13–14)” (*The ESV Study Bible*, 2169).

<sup>2</sup> See Barnett, *Romans*, 162. Also, “This section is probably the most difficult and controversial passage in the letter to the Romans” (Blum, “Romans,” in *CSB Study Bible*, 1792); “We have come to the most controversial section of the most controversial chapter in Paul’s epistle to the Romans” (Kroll, *Romans*, 111).

<sup>3</sup> Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 147.

<sup>4</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 651–652.

<sup>5</sup> D. Martin Lloyd-John, *Romans*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 176.

# HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The controversy surrounding this passage is an old and fascinating one. Two main questions generally form the center of the debate:

- Who is the man?
- Is he regenerate or unregenerate?

## WHO IS THE MAN?

The oldest and predominant view throughout church history is that Paul writes autobiographically, that is he speaks from his own experience. This is precisely what gives rise to the second question. To alleviate the challenge of the second question, some have suggested that Paul is not writing autobiographically.<sup>6</sup>

### “I” AS RHETORICAL

Werner Kümmel’s 1929 landmark publication<sup>7</sup> proposed a new way to understand the passage, namely that Paul is using a rhetorical device to portray human experience in general. This supposed method of “historical exegesis” offered an alternative to the traditional debate. Kümmel’s view has been tremendously influential in modern scholarship. With reference to Romans 7:9, Grant Osborne in his lucid commentary writes,

I think it best to see Paul using himself as an example of all humanity “apart from the law.” He is looking at his own experience of the interplay of the law and sin to be typical of everyone. The biggest problem with this understanding is that it seems implausible that Paul ever thought of himself as “apart from the law”; but he is thinking of himself as symptomatic of every human being struggling with their finite sinfulness.<sup>8</sup>

One major problem with this view is that it is difficult to sustain on exegetical grounds, particularly grammatical and syntactical grounds. Greek scholar and grammarian Daniel Wallace writes, “If one wants to hold the view that Paul is either not describing himself in this text, or else he is speaking corporately (so as to include himself only in a general way), syntax is not the route to get there.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, this proposed view does not naturally derive from the grammar of the text but is rather superimposed.

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<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive list of positions, see Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC, 314-321.

<sup>7</sup> *Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (“Romans 7 and the Conversion of Paul”), first published by J. G. Hinrichs in Leipzig and later republished by Kaiser Verlag in Munich in 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 200.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 531-2.



## “I” AS ADAM

Some have suggested that Paul’s “I” is merely symbolic for Adam. Commenting on Romans 7:9, Ernst Käsemann, for instance, writes, “the event depicted can refer strictly only to Adam. ... There is nothing in the passage which does not fit Adam, and everything fits Adam alone.”<sup>10</sup>

This view, however, fails to adequately account for Paul’s contextual emphasis on the Mosaic law. He explicitly cites the tenth commandment from the Decalogue (7:7), which cannot rightly be related to Adam. Even if it is suggested that coveting was involved in the first temptation, it certainly was not a transgression of the “written code” (7:6).

## “I” AS ISRAEL

Still others have suggested that the rhetorical “I” of the passage represents Israel under the law, striving yet failing to fulfill it. N. T. Wright advocates this view, stating that this passage “is not intended as an exact description of Paul’s, or anyone else’s, actual experience, though it finds echoes in many places both in human life and in literature ancient and modern. That is not the point.” He goes on, “Paul now moves into the present tense, to describe the actual situation (as opposed to the felt experience) of Israel living under the law.”<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, he argues that in this passage Paul’s “much deeper purpose is to describe, from the inside (through the rhetorical ‘I’, rather than by way of pointing the finger from a safe distance), *the plight of Israel under Torah*.”<sup>12</sup>

While this view seems to offer a better account of the contextual data,<sup>13</sup> nevertheless it lacks convincing connection with chapter 6 and 8, fails to adequately explain 7:1-6, and Paul’s appeal to union with Christ in 7:4 and 8:1-2. It relies too heavily on a recapitulation theory of Adam built on 7:9. But this would suggest that Israel was “alive” before the Mosaic law and “died” upon receiving it. Yet, the covenant vows that established her “marriage” to Yahweh was the Mosaic law.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, 1980), 196.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1: Chapters 1-8* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 127.

<sup>12</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1016.

<sup>13</sup> “The claim that the reference here is to Israel is quite attractive and explains many features of the text in illuminating ways” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, vol. 6, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998], 362).

<sup>14</sup> “Thus it is difficult to believe—if the verbs bear their full theological meaning—that Paul could say Israel ‘lived’ before the era of the Mosaic law. One could perhaps understand Paul to say that they received life upon entering the Sinai covenant, but this is not what the text says” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 363).

## “I” AS PAUL

The most consistent and uncomplicated view is that Paul writes autobiographically. Paul's concentrated use of the first-person singular pronoun throughout this passage suggests a personal intimacy deeply relevant to his thesis. Since he has not done so since the opening of the letter, special attention is here drawn. C. E. Raven suggests that “Paul does not write at second-hand, but shares with us the intimacy of his own spiritual struggle.” Henry Alford states, “we must *dismiss from our minds all exegesis which explains the passage of any other, in the first instance, than of Paul himself*: himself indeed, as an *exemplar*, wherein others may see themselves: but not himself *in the person* of others, be they the *Jews*, nationally or individually, or *all mankind*, or *individual men*.”<sup>15</sup> William Griffith adds, “There is such a genuine ring about it that we cannot believe that he is supposing a case, but, on the contrary, is telling an experience. And yet, of course, it is not an experience which is his only, but one that is characteristic of all men in like circumstances.”<sup>16</sup>

The last is the most convincing view accepted in all that follows.

## REGENERATE OR UNREGENERATE?

Since Paul himself is the most straightforward and defensible referent in the passage, we now turn our attention to the oldest controversy in its interpretative legacy. Simply stated, does the “I” of Romans 7:14-25 represent the unregenerate or regenerate Paul?

## WRONG QUESTION?

Some have argued that to focus on whether or not Paul is regenerate or unregenerate here is unhelpful and quite irrelevant to the purpose of the passage.<sup>17</sup> I agree that Paul is not intending us to make this a discussion about regeneration (nowhere is this particular matter presented in the context). But the nature of the man in view is indispensable to a proper interpretation of the cries of his heart—and consequently our appropriation of them in understanding the purpose of the passage. Principle-based application may afford greater latitude here, as will be attempted below. But it is hard to see how we can rightly understand the meaning of Paul's words without rightly understanding the voice from which those words come. Not only this, but it is difficult to see how Paul's personal words, filled with so

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 2:377.

<sup>16</sup> William Griffith, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Devotional Commentary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), 191.

<sup>17</sup> “Both arguments provide strong evidence, which leads me to believe that Paul does not present his personal struggle with the law pre- or post-conversion. Instead, Paul addresses a much larger point. ‘Is Paul telling his autobiography, pre- or post-conversion?’ is the wrong question to ask of the text.” (J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, 182).

much intense expression, would not be grounded in his spiritual condition. Everywhere else, Paul's spiritual condition is the ground for his expressions. This is all the more emphasized in the larger context of Romans 5–8. Lastly, it is unconvincing that these very same expressions could be voiced with equal force and meaning from regenerate and unregenerate hearts alike. The question may not be the point of the passage, but it remains an important question, nonetheless.

## EARLIEST VIEW: UNREGENERATE PAUL

The almost universal interpretation from the earliest Church Fathers is that this passage dramatizes Paul reminiscing upon his unregenerate past under the Mosaic law.<sup>18</sup> This is essentially the view accepted in what follows.<sup>19</sup>

For instance, Irenaeus clearly explains, “when Paul sets forth human infirmity, he says: ‘For I know that there dwelleth in my flesh no good thing,’ showing that the ‘good thing’ of our salvation is not from us, but from God. And again: ‘Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ Then he introduces the Deliverer, [saying,] ‘The grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.’”<sup>20</sup> Tertullian draws attention to the distinction between Paul as he was and as he became, from Judaism under the law to a Christian in the Spirit: “For even if he has affirmed that ‘good dwelleth not in his flesh’, yet (he means) according to ‘the law of the letter’, in which he ‘was’: but according to ‘the law of the Spirit’, to which he annexes us, he frees us from the ‘infirmity of the flesh’.”<sup>21</sup> He sees chapter 8 as the grand solution to the problem presented in chapter 7. He also concedes that Paul is “partly disputing from the standpoint of Judaism,” while insisting that Christians too must forsake “laboring in the law” and walk in the Spirit with all discipline.

## AUGUSTINIAN VIEW: REGENERATE PAUL

There was essentially no interpretative debate over the passage until the time of Augustine. Augustine held the accepted view in all his earlier writings. In his commentary on Romans, he wrote, “The man being described here is under the law, before the coming of grace. Sin overpowers him when he attempts to live righteously in his own strength, without the help of God’s liberating grace.”<sup>22</sup> His view did not change until the controversy with Pelagius. Pelagius was a fifth century monk and theologian who was later denounced by the church as

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<sup>18</sup> “Most of the Fathers believed that here Paul was adopting the persona of an unregenerate man, not describing his own struggles as a Christian. As far as they were concerned, becoming a Christian would deliver a person from the kind of dilemma the apostle is outlining here” (Bray, *Romans* in ACCS, 189–190).

<sup>19</sup> I am calling this view the *Lawyer view*, as explained in the appendix.

<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” ANF, 1:450.

<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, “On Modesty,” ANF, 4:93.

<sup>22</sup> Cited by Bray, *Romans (Revised)* in ACCS, 186.

a heretic. He taught that the natural man had an autonomous free will and an inherent ability to obey God's commands apart from God's help. Appealing to Romans 7:17, 18, and 22, he argued for an elevated esteem of fallen human nature. This instigated a radical shift in Augustine's interpretation of the passage.<sup>23</sup> For the first time, a prominent leader in the church asserted that Romans 7:14-25 captured the spiritual struggle of the apostle Paul as a Christian. John Calvin notes, "Augustine was for a time involved in the common error; but after having more clearly examined the passage, he not only retracted what he had falsely taught, but in his first book to Boniface, he proves, by many strong reasons, that what is said cannot be applied to any but to the regenerate."<sup>24</sup>

But is this the fruit of *reading out* (exegesis) or *reading in* (eisegesis) the meaning of the text? Some, like Richard Lenski, say that "the controversy with Pelagius opened [Augustine's] eyes."<sup>25</sup> Others acknowledge that this change was a disputational expedient. Stephen Voorwinde notes that "the reasons for the change were polemical rather than exegetical."<sup>26</sup> The question has been raised whether Augustine would have changed his interpretation were it not for the controversy with Pelagius. Voorwinde asks, "Was Augustine really a paragon of exegetical honesty or rather a victim of polemical necessity? Whatever the precise answer to this question, Augustine's change of position proved to be profoundly influential."<sup>27</sup>

He was undoubtedly the most articulate and influential figure in the early church. His view soon was adopted as the standard. Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Anselm, Aquinas, the western church throughout the medieval era, and most of the sixteenth-century Reformers followed Augustine. Indeed, the predominant view throughout most of church history, including today, "is deeply indebted to Augustine."<sup>28</sup>

## POST-REFORMATION MOVEMENTS

Several post-Reformation movements have used the Augustinian view of Romans 7 to promote their theories on sanctification. Finding the passage too bleak and the persona too defeated, some have preferred to see the relationship between chapter 7 and 8 as one of

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<sup>23</sup> "When the Pelagians, adopting this interpretation, appealed to vers. 17, 18, 22, in proof of their estimate of fallen human nature, Aug. thought that the older interpretation was out of harmony with the general mind of Scripture. Accordingly, in his later works, he maintained that the ἐγώ of this passage is that of the *regenerate*. (*Retractationes*, i. 23; ii. 7; *contr. duas Epp. Pelag.* i. 10; *contr. Faust.* xv. 8.)" (H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899], 121-122.).

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Romans*, 264.

<sup>25</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation*, 473.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Voorwinde, "Romans 7 - A History of Interpretation" in *Vox Reformata* (2018), 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001), 113.

progress and triumph in the Christian life. From this perspective emerges theories of sanctification that speak of a second work of grace.

#### HOLINESS MOVEMENT – SECOND WORK OF GRACE

Though John Wesley did not fully embrace Augustine's view of Romans 7,<sup>29</sup> the holiness movement that followed in Wesleyan form assumed its premise, namely that it applies to Christians. Joining this with a different view of sanctification, it allowed for a man to live a regenerate yet non-sanctified life. Unsettled in such a state, the movement called Christians to a second work of grace that must be sought by faith. This was the only way to enjoy a sanctified life. It was a journey that could potentially lead to "entire sanctification" or Christian perfection.

#### KESWICK MOVEMENT – THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

Distinguished from this Wesleyan school of thought is the broadly Calvinistic movement known from the Keswick convention (1870s). The Keswick movement delineates the defeated Christian life and the victorious Christian life. This ushered in supposed distinctions between being Spirit-indwelt and Spirit-filled.

#### PENTECOSTAL – SPIRIT-BAPTISM

After these developments came the Pentecostal movement, which related the notion of Spirit-baptism to the second work of grace necessary for a victorious Christian life. To be Spirit-filled, according to this view, one must be baptized in the Spirit, which is evidenced by speaking in tongues.

#### PLYMOUTH BRETHREN – TWO ACTIVE NATURES

Unlike the previous three, the Plymouth Brethren movement sought to alleviate some of the difficulties of the passage by proposing that it is describing the struggle between two active natures residing within the Christian. The Scofield Study Bible, reflecting this view, on this passage says, "And then, to show the futility of a renewed man going back to law, the apostle gives his own experience while seeking, as a renewed man, to produce a holy character by legal obedience. That experience demonstrates that in the believer dwells still the old Adamic nature—'sin.' It is 'a law in the members' of the believer, though the new nature is also there (7:5–25)." This view seems to be reflected in the comment, "for the present, the Christian is a walking civil war."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wesley states that Paul "interweaves the whole process of a man reasoning, groaning, striving, and escaping from the legal to the evangelical state. This he does from ver. 7 to the end of this chapter" (John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* [New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818], 392).

<sup>30</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 11:127. Though Harrison (1902-1999) was a Presbyterian denominationally, he shared certain views similar to the Plymouth Brethren.

## CHAFER – CARNAL CHRISTIAN

Lewis Sperry Chafer concluded from the Augustinian view of this passage that there must be the categorical possibility of a “carnal Christian”—that is a man who accepts Christ as Savior yet not as Lord. He is saved but lives as a defeated Christian. He lacks the Spirit’s filling and therefore stands in need of dedication. To become a spiritual Christian and accept Christ as Lord he must experience the Spirit’s filling. Chafer writes,

Since God in Christ has ‘condemned sin in the flesh,’ the whole will of God may ‘be fulfilled in us,’ but never *by* us (Rom. 8:3–4). That is, the Spirit is appointed to bring the whole will of God to realization in the believer’s life, which experience could never be achieved when depending upon human ability (cf. Rom. 7:15–25). This end result, which is doing the whole will of God, is not accomplished in all Christians or by virtue of the fact that they are saved, but only in those among the saved ones who ‘walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ The contrast is between those Christians who depend on their own human resources—which line of action is compatible with the character of all law-relationship to God—and those Christians who depend upon the power of the indwelling Spirit.

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The term *carnal* is thus seen to be a description of the spiritual estate of a Christian who is dominated by the flesh rather than by the Spirit of God. He is one who is ‘walking’ after the flesh. In the same context (Rom. 7:14–25) in which he declares himself to be *flesh* (7:18), the Apostle asserts, ‘but I am carnal, sold under sin’ (7:14). This portion of the Scriptures—so personal in character—is presented by the Apostle as an example of the conflict which is developed by the presence of the flesh in the one who is saved.<sup>31</sup>

Donald Barnhouse reflects this view when he comments on Romans 7:14, “This word *carnal* is used to describe a low state of Christian living in contrast to a higher.”<sup>32</sup>

## HIGHER LIFE – SECRET OF A SPIRIT FILLED LIFE

More popular today is the higher life movement which talks about getting out of Romans 7 and into Romans 8. Books like *Secret of a Spirit Filled Life* by Charles Chaney and *The Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life* by Bill Bright represent this movement.

## SUMMARY

Throughout church history various movements have grounded significant aspects of their theology to the Augustinian view of Romans 7.

- The second work of grace and entire sanctification theory of the Wesleyan perfectionist movement.
- The crisis, consecration theory of the Keswick movement, best known for their “surrender (let go) + faith (let God)” approach to sanctification and decisionism.
- Pentecostalism’s “Spirit-baptism” experienced in the second work of grace in order to reach a victorious Christian life (evidenced by speaking in tongues).

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 199–200, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Barnhouse, *God’s Freedom*, 235.

- The Plymouth Brethren revival of the struggle with two active natures.
- The Chaferian introduction of the “carnal Christian” who is saved but not obedient.
- The gnostic leaning language of secrets to the higher Christian life.

Finally, Professor Robert Reymond points out that these misuses of the Augustinian view have also led to antinomianism in practice:

The antinomian has also used the Augustinian interpretation of the passage as his excuse for the sin in his life when confronted by his pastor: “Well, I’ve been taught that the man in Romans 7 is the apostle Paul, the most mature Christian of his day, who could never do what he wanted to do but rather continually sinned against his will. While I wish I didn’t sin, and I hate it when I do, I guess, like Paul, I’m just the carnal man in Romans 7!” To use this passage in these ways is a travesty! Nothing Paul ever wrote did he intend the Christian to use as an excuse for the toleration of sin in his life, and no biblical passage should ever be used to justify a “carnal” Christian existence.<sup>33</sup>

All these movements misunderstand, misuse, and misappropriate Romans 7:14-25. To be sure, this is not true for all who hold to the Augustinian view. The purpose of this historical review is intended only to highlight some of the movements that have wrongly appealed to the Augustinian view of Romans 7 for support.

## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

One of the most common defenses of the Augustinian view of Romans 7:14-25 is the powerful witness of personal experience. Indeed, it has been fortified, both then and now, by the appeal to personal experience. It is said that after Augustine changed his position he then “read Paul in the context of his own long struggle with sexual passion. Augustine had experienced an *intellectual* conversion to Christianity, but found his desire (*concupiscentia*) continuing to battle against ‘the law of his mind.’ For Augustine, such internal dividedness could only be overcome by the overwhelming and personal gift of God’s grace, but even when the grace was given, the struggle continued in the Christian’s life. He therefore explicitly read Romans 7 as being about Paul’s life after his baptism.”<sup>34</sup> He argued that analogous inner conflicts are found in every true Christian.

Today commentaries and books tell us that Romans 7:14-25 is a picture of the normal Christian life. One very capable expositor even declared that experience is the best exegete of Romans 7.<sup>35</sup> In his commentary on Romans, James R. Edwards writes, “Who can deny that the voice of the apostle echoes in the experience of all Christians and in their frustration at the persistence of sin? ‘The world is too much with us,’ said Wordsworth, and this is no less

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 1131.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 113. See Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 28–36; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 14–24.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Borgman, “Romans 7:14-25 - Who Is The Wretched Man?” (2005-07-03) sermon.

true for Christians.”<sup>36</sup> Kent Hughes agrees, “This is Paul’s autobiography, but it is also the experience of every Christian.”<sup>37</sup> Another excellent commentary on Romans, suggests that seeing the passage this way is crucial: “Although this is an interpretation that some reject, it is the key to understanding a vitally important passage on authentic Christian experience.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, and with soothing eloquence, Charles Cranfield argues that the words of Romans 7:14-25,

bring out forcefully an aspect of the Christian life which we gloss over to our undoing. When Christians fail to take account of the fact that they (and all their fellow Christians also) are still [“sold under sin”], they are specially dangerous both to others and to themselves because they are self-deceived. The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact of his continuing sinfulness, the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Christian experience seems to strengthen the argument for the Augustinian view. Closely related to this is the resonating comfort it brings. I am aware that scores of Christians throughout the centuries have found enormous comfort in the Augustinian view of this passage. A. W. Pink goes so far as to say, “There are few chapters in the New Testament which the Devil hates more than Romans 7, and strenuously and subtly does he strive to rob the Christian of its comforting and establishing message.”<sup>40</sup>

But should experience be the lens through which we interpret Scripture? Should our interpretation be secured by the comfort it brings? Emotional appeal cannot substitute for reasoning with the text. Experiential resonance has no logical force in the science of interpretation.

## SAINTS STRUGGLE WITH SIN

At this point we must openly acknowledge and insist that saints still struggle with sin. That is regenerate, justified, forgiven Christians still sin. Not only this, but sin remains a reality to the very end of the saint’s life in this present world. James says, “For we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). John says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Christians are repeatedly warned to be on guard against sin as a very real threat: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). To struggle with sin throughout is part of our sojourn. That is why we are repeated exhorted with such words as: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men,

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<sup>36</sup> James R. Edwards, *Romans*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes, *Romans*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> St. Helen’s Bishopsgate, *Read Mark Learn: Romans* (Tain, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 137.

<sup>39</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 357–358.

<sup>40</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 168.



be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13); "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (Ephesians 6:10); "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:13); "stand firm thus in the Lord" (Philippians 4:1); "stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15); "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8); "take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability" (2 Peter 3:17); "be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7); "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2); "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard" (Colossians 1:23); "let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1); "sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12); "if you show partiality, you are committing sin" (James 2:9); "whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17); "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23); "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Timothy 5:20); "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13); "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4); "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Indeed, we have only a small beginning of true obedience. Spiritual growth is filled with tension and conflict with evil. The promise is sure, yet perfection is not realized until glorification. So we presently live in an already-not-yet tension. We experience the overlap of two realms. So that Paul could say, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). And also, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). Accordingly, Peter exhorts us, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

There is no question or debate over these realities: saints still struggle with sin. Nevertheless, these realities do not determine the interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 one way or the other. The real challenge of interpretation belongs to the category of exegesis, not experience.

# INTERPRETING THE PASSAGE

Without question, Romans 7:14-25 presents considerable interpretive difficulties. To suggest that any given interpretation is without its challenges is at best naïve and shallow, and at worst arrogant and presumptuous. So whatever criticisms are here presented against the Augustinian view, they are presented with respect and appreciation for all who demonstrate a God-honoring effort to wrestle with the text. It is a difficult passage, and each view has its snags. That being said, I am convinced that authorial intent is not lost or inaccessible.

The prolific history of interpretation concerning this passage betrays not the confusion of its meaning as much as the impressive ability of man to argue opposing views from the same text. Here we have a powerful example of how we tend to read and interpret Scripture through a selective lens. Moreover, it is one of the most distinguished demonstrations that we are ever prone to see in Scripture what we are seeking to see. This should at once humble us and heighten our fear of the Lord in the task of interpretation. It is a most powerful inducement to the duty and commitment to the context of the text.

Part of the responsibility of the *exegete* (the student who seeks to extract the authorial intent from a given text) is to know and understand interpretive difficulties. To make informed exegetical decisions. To deal honestly with existing interpretations. To interact with challenges and opposing views. This means that the quality and quantity of different interpretations should factor into, though not determine, conclusions. In the case of Romans 7:14-25, many respected and faithful students of sacred Scripture side with Augustine. I have sought to show in the sections above how the history of interpretation and the testimony of Christian experience may help to explain why so many excellent expositors have accepted the Augustinian view. As I examined the passage and its interpretations, I became increasingly intimidated by the sheer number of highly gifted expositors who support the Augustinian view. This includes some of the men that I most love and respect as scholars and theologians and teachers. My point here is to acknowledge the quality and quantity of these expositors and to recognize that their observations and arguments should be carefully considered and factored. This, by God's grace, I trust I have done in humility with intellectual honesty. I will attempt to interact with some of the more substantial observations and arguments in favor of the Augustinian view within the discourse analysis (noted by ►). In the end, the contextual, grammatical, and rhetorical factors, in my understanding, outweigh the observations and arguments in support of the Augustinian view.

Let me acknowledge at this point that the interpretation of this passage does not distinguish expositors theologically or denominationally. In saying this, I am speaking only of those expositors who accept the plain message of Romans up to this point, namely that all people everywhere without exception are really and radically corrupt and culpable and that

salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Sadly, some have attempted to suggest a connection between one's interpretation of this passage and one's theological position. For instance, some have implied that if you do not accept the Augustinian view, you are in class with the Greek Fathers or Pelagius or Jacob Arminius. A. W. Pink inferred that rejecting the Augustinian view is in class with Wesleyanism. All this is simply fallacious, divisive, and childish. In fact, there are excellent expositors on both sides of the debate in every major theological and denominational branch: Lutheran, Reformed, Dutch Reformed, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist.<sup>41</sup> Even more importantly, this kind of partisan spirit hinders objective exegesis and promotes dogmatism. Let us avoid linking one's interpretation of this passage to a particular theological or denominational persuasion, unlearning traditional biases and devoting ourselves to search out the authorial intent of the text.

## EXEGESIS

The task of interpreting Scripture preeminently involves the discipline of exegesis. Exegesis derives from a Greek term that literally means “lead out of.” When applied to the discipline of interpreting a written text, it refers to the process of “reading out” the text's meaning rather than “reading in” some other meaning.

The term *exegesis* is used ... in a consciously limited sense to refer to the historical investigation into the meaning of the biblical text. ... Exegesis therefore answers the question, What did the biblical author mean? It has to do both with *what* he said (the content itself) and *why* he said it at any given point (the literary context)—as much as that might be discovered, given our distance in time, language, and culture. Furthermore, exegesis is primarily concerned with intentionality: What did the author *intend* his original readers to understand?<sup>42</sup>

The process of exegesis involves factoring historical and grammatical features of a given text. As noted above, excellent expositors are on both sides of the debate. One great challenge is that both have defended their positions by appealing to exegesis.

## MAKING THE CASE

Debate over the best interpretation of this passage has often been argued with a rather simplistic formula: *add up the arguments and subtract the counterarguments for each view*.<sup>43</sup> It is quite common to read that there are good arguments on both sides of the debate. This

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<sup>41</sup> Reformers: John Calvin (Augustinian view), Martin Bucer (Lawyer view); Dutch Reformed: Louis Berkhof (A), Herman Ridderbos (L); Lutheran: Richard Lenski (A), Douglas Moo (L); Presbyterian: John Murray (A), Robert Reymond (L); Anglican: J. I. Packer (A), William H. G. Thomas (L); Baptist: Robert Mounce (A), Thomas Schreiner (L).

<sup>42</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>43</sup> This may include assigning different weights according to some perceived order of importance.

tends to encourage making the case for a given view by a simple tally of “good arguments.” But Romans 7:13-25 challenges this rather *deductive* approach, demanding a more *inductive* investigation of the context.

A simple tally of what statements fit best with one view or another will not do. The best interpretation depends not only on details but the right sort of details. Interpretation requires more than information about statements. It is more, for instance, a matter of analyzing an argument than parsing Greek words. It is more than explaining the meaning of a given statement by cross-referencing it with another text in a different context. More than attention to detail is needed. Attention to the discourse is key.

## DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis describes an interdisciplinary approach to literary investigation which particularly recognizes that “language is not used in isolated words or even sentences but occurs in larger units called discourses.”<sup>44</sup> It gives particular attention to linguistics, semantics, and the flow of an overall discourse. In didactic contexts, it places emphasis on tracing the argument of the text. “Discourse analysis appraises the language of the text as a whole, keeping in perspective both the language of the text as a system and the individual message(s) of the text. ... It is a reading of discourse based on comprehensive linguistic models of language structure and cohesiveness.”<sup>45</sup> In short, it provides a useful framework for a coherent model of interpretation.<sup>46</sup>

By applying principles of discourse analysis to Romans 7:13-25 we may have greater confidence that the authorial intent is not hopelessly clouded by good arguments on both sides.

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<sup>44</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 298.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey T. Reed, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, vol. 25, New Testament Tools and Studies (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), 194. So also, “The study of the structure of coherent units of text that have a discernible context. Discourse analysis focuses on how language is used in a text and includes the subdisciplines of text-linguistics, which examines textual cohesion and the development of argument, and pragmatics, which studies the interaction between speech and the shared presuppositions that remain unarticulated. In pursuit of these goals, discourse analysis may draw on the fields of rhetoric, anthropology, sociology, semiotics, literary criticism and reader-response criticism” (Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony J. Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 36).

<sup>46</sup> I recognize that some modern linguistics emphasize the importance of discourse analysis at the expense of grammatical-historical principles of interpretation so as to propose a “new hermeneutic.” Contrary to Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (1989), I overtly reject the subjectivity of this approach and firmly hold to a consistent, literary, grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Discourse analysis is a very useful tool when used in conjunction within this exegetical method and should not to be confused with the so-called “new hermeneutic.”

# ANALYZING THE DISCOURSE

What follows is a rather basic discourse analysis of Romans 7:13-25. It outlines the context, the argument, the grammar, and the persona of the passage. The conclusion renders the Augustinian view discordant with the discourse. In its place, the earliest view proves to be harmonious, which I suggest calling the *Lawyer view*.<sup>47</sup> Arguments advanced in favor of the Augustinian view are addressed where appropriate in the analysis and objections to the Lawyer view are addressed in the appendix.

## THE CONTEXT

The first and most decisive factor for the interpretation of any text is its context. The immediate context of Romans 7:13-25 concerns the relationship of the justified Christian to the Mosaic law.

## THE MOSAIC LAW

The hinge on which the interpretation of this passage turns is the law. The place of the Mosaic law in the Christian's life is a critical feature of the immediate context. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argued that the man could not be regenerate on this ground, "Why not the regenerate? Because that would be to fly in the face of everything that the Apostle has been telling us from chapter 5, verse 20. Indeed, we could even go back to the beginning of chapter 5; but it becomes especially cogent in verse 20. 'Moreover', he says, 'the law entered'. Now that is what we are dealing with in this 7th chapter—the place and function of the Law."<sup>48</sup>

Paul uses the word for "law" (*nomos*) no less than 23 times in chapter 7, compared to only 2 times in chapter 6 (6:14, 15). Since Paul has moved from justification to sanctification in his larger discourse, he is clearly addressing the relationship of the law to the Christian's sanctification. Leon Morris explains, "First, we should be clear that Paul is writing about the law, not trying to answer the questions that modern people ask. This passage is not primarily a piece of personal autobiography or a psychological study of the Christian experience. It is a sustained treatment of the place of the law. For the Jew the law was central, and Paul has denied that the Jew was right."<sup>49</sup> Douglas Moo stresses the importance of this point, "As we approach this controversial paragraph, we must keep in mind that Paul's focus is still on the Mosaic law. And what Paul says about the Mosaic law comes to much the same thing,

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<sup>47</sup> Taken from the New Testament's use of *nomikos*, denoting that which pertains to Mosaic Law, or one who interprets, pursues, and rests on the Mosaic Law.

<sup>48</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 192.

<sup>49</sup> Morris, *Romans*, 276.

whatever we decide about the identity and spiritual condition of the person whose situation is depicted in these verses.”<sup>50</sup>

The chapter opens with Paul explicitly addressing Christian “brothers ... who know the law” (7:1).<sup>51</sup> We know that he speaks of the Mosaic law because he calls it “the written code” (7:6), cites from it the tenth commandment of the Decalogue (7:7), and later calls it “the law of God” (7:22).<sup>52</sup> He describes service to the Mosaic law as “the old way” (7:6), deprecating its binding place in the New Covenant saint’s life. This is the point of 7:1-6, where Paul uses the analogy of a marriage covenant. Just as the death of a spouse brings an end to that marriage covenant, so in a similar way the death of Christ brings an end to the Old Covenant. Because Christians are united to Christ, Paul then says, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ” (7:4). He then emphasizes the Christian as “belonging” to the risen Christ in contradistinction to the Old Covenant law, “so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead” (7:4). Christ’s death is pictured here as releasing us from the Old Covenant, and His resurrection as binding us to the New Covenant. Paul succinctly concludes by writing, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (7:6).

## CHANGE IN COVENANTS

This last statement has massive implications and is vastly important to the discourse. It speaks of a *change* in covenants, not an *addition*. The strong language about the Christian’s relationship to the law (i.e. “died to the law,” “free from the law,” “released from the law,” etc.) demands careful consideration and application.

### THE OLD COVENANT IS OBSOLETE

Paul’s argument here is no less than that Christians are not under the Old Covenant law. We know from Hebrews 8:6 that “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better.” The New Covenant is better, being joined to Christ is better, because the Old Covenant, though holy, was helpless. Hebrews goes on, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for

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<sup>50</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 442.

<sup>51</sup> “Verse 1, which must never be overlooked in any proper interpretation of the passage, shows that Jews are addressed, and it seems in every way best to regard the description from verses 7–25 as that of a Jew under the Mosaic law, who valued its spirituality but failed to fulfil its requirements” (Griffith, *Romans*, 192).

<sup>52</sup> Also, all previous references to the “law” refer to the Mosaic Law. Schreiner notes, “we have already seen that the Mosaic law is the subject of discussion in Rom. 2–5. In particular, the law that provokes sin is Mosaic (5:20), and the law that believers are no longer under is Mosaic as well (6:14–15). Moreover, the subsequent context indicates that the Mosaic law is in view, for Paul specifically cites the tenth commandment of the Decalogue (7:7), and he is certainly referring to the Mosaic law in 7:12 in affirming the holiness of the law and the goodness of God’s commandments” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 346).

a second” (Hebrews 8:7). But, as here in Romans, the fault does not lie with the law: “For he finds fault with them” (Hebrews 8:8). Again, just as here in Romans, Hebrews says, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13; see also Hebrews 7:18, 22; 8:6, 8; 9:11-15; 12:24). Obsolete is strong language that speaks of consigning something to the past; to render it deprecated, outmoded, and even abrogated.

#### THE OLD COVENANT IS A SYSTEM

Moreover, Paul speaks of the Mosaic law as a system, a whole covenant economy. To be released from part of it is to be released from all of it. After all, the Mosaic law is a unit (James 2:10; Galatians 5:3; Matthew 5:19). For example, the Mosaic law as a unit prescribed dietary restrictions, circumcision, and the Sabbath. Christians are not under any of these laws because Christians are not under the Mosaic economy (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; Romans 14:3, 5; Colossians 2:16; Galatians 5:3; Hebrews 9:10).

Some try to divide the law into its respective moral, civil, and ceremonial parts. But this is not sustainable from the Mosaic law itself. Take Leviticus 19, for instance. *Moral* law is communicated in 19:11 (“you shall not lie”), *civil* law in 19:15 (“you shall do not injustice in court”), and *ceremonial* in 19:19 (“nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material”). These are interwoven with no clear justification for division. The tradition of the moral, civil, and ceremonial division of the law is purely philosophical and finds no basis in either testament. The Mosaic law represents the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel: “These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai” (Leviticus 26:46). Because God does not change, we would expect that the moral standards of the Old Covenant will be expressed in the moral standards of the New Covenant. But nowhere is the New Covenant saint commanded to submit to the Old Covenant law. Nor are New Covenant saints authorized to divide or cherry pick laws from the Old Covenant system and bind them on themselves or others.

The more one discerns the radical newness of the New Covenant the less the Augustinian view of this passage makes sense. The more consistent one is with the deprecation of the Old Covenant law for the New Covenant saint the more clear this passage becomes. It is difficult to overstate the significance of Paul’s point concerning the Mosaic law. Christ has inaugurated a *change* of covenants, not an *addition*.

This does not mean that Christian’s should discard the Old Covenant Scriptures. It simply means that they are not bound in whole or in part to the Old Covenant law. Indeed, the Old Covenant Scriptures remain profitable for New Covenant Christians in non-legal ways (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:16).

We should also note that the Old Covenant law is made obsolete not by destruction but by fulfillment (Matthew 5:17-18; 26:28). Christ fulfilled all the righteous demands of the law (Romans 10:4), bore its curses (Galatians 3:13), and now in and through Him the promises of the law are made possible (Romans 15:8; 2 Corinthians 1:20). Should we now seek sanctification through conformity to what is “obsolete” and “vanishing away”? Is justification by faith alone but sanctification is now by works of the law (Galatians 3:1-3)? Should Christians serve what Christ already served and fulfilled to the full? Should Christians go to Moses to become more like Christ? These questions are pertinent to the immediate context of Romans 7.

### DELIGHTING IN THE LAW OF GOD (7:22)

- The Augustinian view is often argued on the basis that none but a regenerate man could say, “I delight in the law of God” (7:22). But this argument fails to recognize the point that we have just labored to appreciate. The whole context of this discourse is arguing *against*, not *for*, Christians turning to the law of God.

The New Covenant saint is “not under law” (6:14, 15). He “is free from that law,” having “died to the law” (7:4). Indeed, “now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (7:6).

So comments like the following are discordant to the discourse: “As a justified believer, he knows that his inner being has been captured by God, and that at his very heart he has been set free from sin. Now he is a slave to God (6:22) and to His law (7:25), which means that his will agrees with, and delights in, God’s law, wanting to obey it and therefore hating his constant rebellion.”<sup>53</sup> A Christian is not a slave to the Mosaic law. Therefore, a Christian should not be “serving” (as a slave: δουλεύω) the law of God with his mind (7:25).

### CHANGE IN SALVATION-HISTORICAL REALMS

This opening section signals both a change of covenants in the death and resurrection of Christ and when applied to the believing heart a change in power and authority for the believer. The Christ event is salvation-historical, inaugurating in time a change of dominions. Christ has revolutionized both history and hearts, changing eras and egos. Christ was crucified and raised from the dead only once, and yet every believer is joined to that objective reality subjectively at different times through faith (6:4). The objective changes history and yet its benefits are realized subjectively. In a similar way, Christ’s death and resurrection brought an end to the Old Covenant (objectively) and the power struggles associated with keeping that law are brought to an end when a heart is united to Christ by faith (subjectively).

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<sup>53</sup> Bishopsgate, *Romans*, 137.



The objective and subjective dimensions are coordinate in chapters 6 and 7. Missing this will surely become one source of confusion. Not only has the Old Covenant been deprecated in Christ and Him crucified, but so too has the saint's powerless struggle to honor God. But rather than placing emphasis on regeneration, Paul stresses here the contrast between the law and the Spirit. This more clearly links the objective and the subjective—the New Covenant gift of the Holy Spirit (objective) and the Spirit's power in the life of the regenerate (subjective). Focus is on the experiential differences in God's provision, pivoting on the “now” of the Christ event (7:6; 8:1). Accordingly, we should expect Paul in this context to discuss not only a change of covenants but a change in the power linked to the respective covenant provisions: law in the Old and Spirit in the New.

#### HOLY AND HELPLESS

Romans 7 shows the Mosaic law to be both holy and helpless. Critical in the discourse is the statement, “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (7:5). Strikingly, sin and the law have been closely linked. Notice the parallels between Paul's treatment of “sin” in chapter 6 and “law” in chapter 7:

“sin will have no dominion (κυριεύω) over you” (6:14)	“the law is binding (κυριεύω) [lit. ‘has dominion over’] on a person only as long as he lives” (7:1)
“died to sin” (6:2)	“died to the law” (7:4)
“set free from sin” (6:18)	“free from that law” (7:3)
“the body of sin might be brought to nothing (καταργέω)” (6:6)	“we are released from (καταργέω) [lit. ‘brought to nothing’ regarding] the law” (7:6)
“in newness (καινότης) of life” (6:4)	“in the new way (καινότης) [lit. ‘newness’] of the Spirit” (7:6)

The parallels between “sin” and “law” are striking, even startling. The law is said to bring the knowledge of sin (3:20), increase sin (5:20), and arouse sinful passions (7:5). So in 7:7-12, Paul clarifies. He extols the law as holy and yet shows that it is at the same time helpless to enable what it commands. While the fault lies with the sinner, not the law, the fact remains that the law is helpless to justify or sanctify. As Martin Lloyd-Jones said, “sanctification by the law is as impossible as was justification by the law.”

Sanctification, or growing in the life and likeness of Christ, is Paul's primary concern in this section of his letter. But it can hardly be sustained from the text that Romans 7:13-25

furnishes a fitting example or illustration of Paul, the Christian, wrongly pursuing Christian sanctification. This passage certainly teaches a lesson that fits the context of sanctification, but not by way of Christian example. Much more suitable is the straightforward portrayal of Paul as a wretched failure because he was under the law. His point is quite plain: being under the law will only lead to death, not life (7:10).

#### AN INSTRUMENT OF DEATH NOT LIFE

Moo points out that “the sustained argument about the law in 7:1–8:4, as virtually all interpreters agree, focuses on the way that sin has used the law to produce death. This point is made clearly in vv. 1–6, where we find the basic ‘positive’ point Paul wants to make here. Believers need to be released from the law’s binding authority (7:4, 6) because the law unleashes the power of sin and therefore brings death (7:5).”<sup>54</sup>

This brings us to 7:7. George Ladd notes that “Paul’s concern in this passage is not life in the flesh but the nature of the law. ‘Is the law sin?’ (Rom. 7:7). No; but because sin dwells in humanity, the holy law shows sin to be sin and thus becomes an instrument of death. But it is sin, not the law, that brings death (Rom. 7:10–11).”<sup>55</sup> So, “In 7:7–25, Paul defends the law, asserting its essential goodness (v. 12) at the same time as he elaborates the involvement of the law in the sin-death nexus (vv. 7–12). In vv. 13–25 especially, it becomes clear that human inability to do the law, caused by sin, is the root problem: the ‘I’ agrees that the law is good and wills to do the law but is unable to accomplish it. The result is helplessness and defeat.”<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, Romans 7:14–25 provides a deeply practical illustration of Romans 7:10 (“The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me”). As noted below, the grammar of verse 14 closely links the rest of the chapter to verse 13. And in verse 13 the thesis of the section is given by the prompt: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good” (7:13). All that follows explains and supports this thesis.<sup>57</sup> The concluding climax of the passage confirms and closes this thesis with the words, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24).

Paul Barnett writes, “His only point throughout is that Sin ruled in his fallen flesh and that law only made things worse.”<sup>58</sup> Robert Reymond says that the passage is “an illustration of the impotence of the law to sanctify the unregenerate heart and the frustration unto death

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 2:207.

<sup>55</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 552.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, 207.

<sup>57</sup> “The section’s opening verse (v. 13) explains how the law brought death to Paul as an unbeliever” (*The ESV Study Bible*, 2169).

<sup>58</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 165.

that any and every unregenerate person will experience who would sincerely seek to achieve a righteousness before God on the basis of his own law-keeping.”<sup>59</sup> Thomas Schreiner suggests that this makes the most sense out of the passage because it is paradigmatic, that is it is setting up a pattern to illustrate how utterly futile and frustrating turning to law is in the pursuit of life and transformation: “The account given here of Paul’s experience is relayed precisely because it is paradigmatic. The law, although good, cannot be the agent of transformation and renewal, for the law itself does not bestow the ability to keep its commands. We see in the history of Paul that the law apart from the Spirit does not transform but kills.”<sup>60</sup>

## THE “LAW” AND THE “SPIRIT”

Another informative contextual feature is Paul’s concentration of the two alternative covenantal provisions, namely the “law” and the “Spirit.” In chapter 7, Paul uses the word “law” 23 times in 16 verses. The “Spirit” is only used once in 7:6. In chapter 8, he uses the word “law” only 3 times. But mentions the Holy “Spirit” 20 times in 14 verses.<sup>61</sup> These details become even more striking when seen how these two words are distributed through the book of Romans.

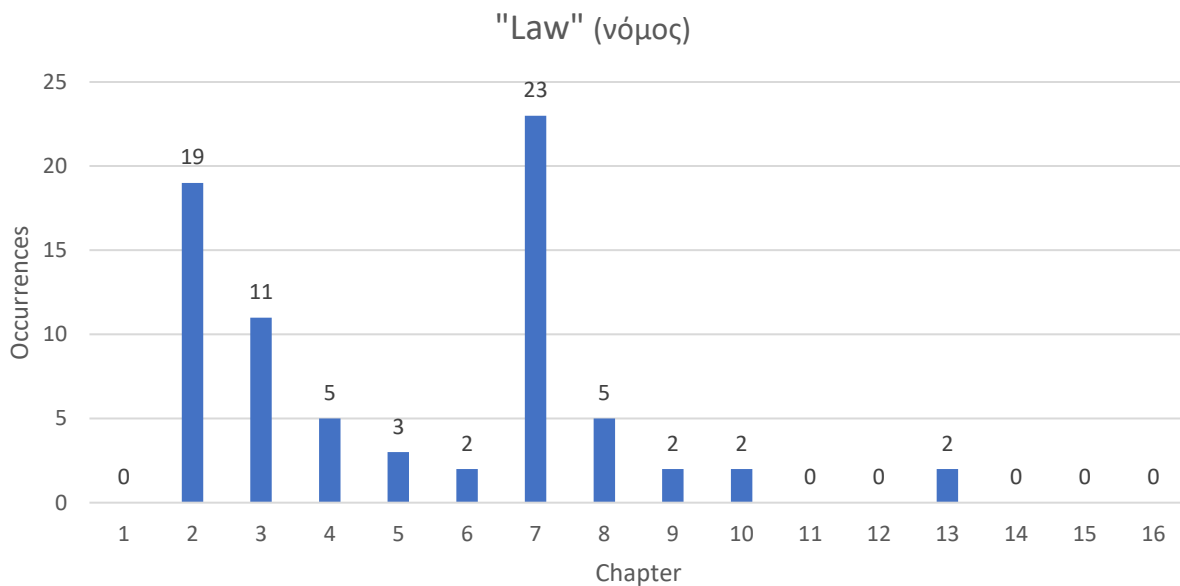
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<sup>59</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1128.

<sup>60</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 379.

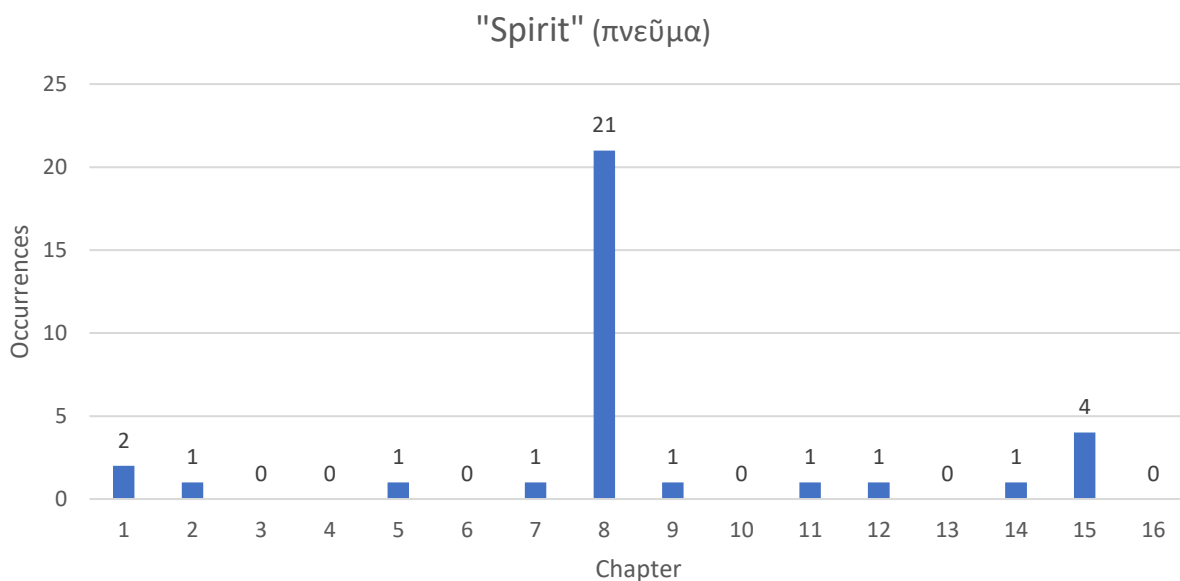
<sup>61</sup> Two other times the word “spirit” occurs but these are in reference to the human spirit.

**FIGURE 1 — DISTRIBUTION OF “LAW”**



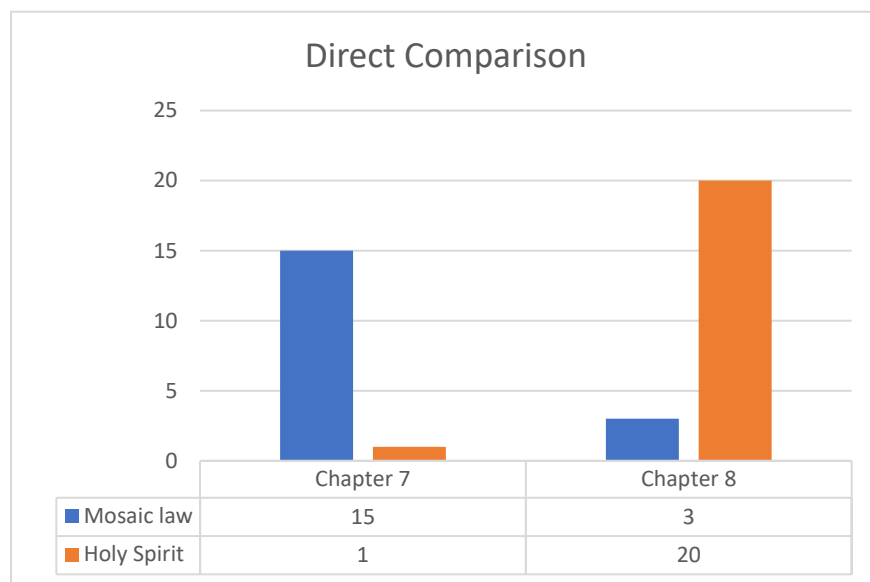
This chart shows the distribution of the Greek word for “law” (νόμος) in the book of Romans. It is to be noted that not every instance refers to the Mosaic law. For example, only 3 of the 5 instances in chapter 8 refer to the Mosaic law (8:3, 4, 7). The 2 found in 8:2 represent a principle or rule.

**FIGURE 2 — DISTRIBUTION OF “SPIRIT”**



This chart shows the distribution of the Greek word for “spirit” (πνεῦμα) in the book of Romans. It is to be noted that not every instance refers to the Holy Spirit. For example, only 19 of the 21 instances in chapter 8 refer to the Holy Spirit. Also, the ESV has two occurrences of “Spirit” in 8:27, but the second is provided by the grammar rather than an explicit occurrence of the noun. In total, Romans 8 has 20 instances of direct references to the Holy Spirit.

**FIGURE 3 — DIRECT COMPARISON OF THE MOSAIC LAW AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**



This chart shows a direct comparison and contrast between Romans 7 and 8. The Mosaic law is referred to explicitly 15 times in chapter 7 and only 3 times in chapter 8. The inverse is true for the Holy Spirit. He is only referred to explicitly 1 time in chapter 7 and 20 times in chapter 8.

It is worth noting that these two chapters host the highest number of occurrences of these words in the whole New Testament. “Law” is mentioned in Romans 7 more than in any other New Testament chapter. Likewise, “Spirit” is mentioned in Romans 8 more than in any other chapter in the New Testament. If ever there was a meaningful contrast between the holy and helpless law of the Old Covenant and the holy and powerful Spirit of the New Covenant, surely it is here. In other words, this helps to show that Romans 7 is a context in contrast with Romans 8. Furthermore, given the salvation-historical discourse markers, this contrast suggests that the differences between chapter 7 and 8 correspond to salvation-historical differences—including a contrast of covenants. It is not contemporaneous nor progressive.

Gundry observes a mutually exclusive dynamic between the two, “The ‘I’ in 7:14–25 is not merely unable to avoid a mixture of the good and the bad. It cannot do the good at all, only the bad. Sin has taken over so completely that the ‘I’ is imprisoned. Contrariwise, those who are in Christ ‘do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit’ (8:4). The wording is exclusive.”<sup>62</sup> Schreiner notes that “the contrast between Rom. 7:14–25 and 8:1–17 is so dramatic that it is difficult to believe that the experience delineated is Christian experience in both cases.”<sup>63</sup>

The Augustinian view contradicts this data and its contextual import. Cranfield argues that ► chapters 7 and 8 are “not two successive stages but two different aspects, two contemporaneous realities, of the Christian life, both of which continue so long as the Christian is in the flesh.”<sup>64</sup> But should any reader expect such an inverted contrast for the

<sup>62</sup> Gundry, 238.

<sup>63</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 387.

<sup>64</sup> Cranfield, 356.

purpose of describing what should be expected as normal “contemporaneous realities” within a single soul? Sam Storms notes that “there is a shocking absence in 7:7–25 of references to the Holy Spirit, in contrast to 7:6 and 8:1ff. in which they abound. Indeed, the entire tone of 7:7–25 is Spirit-less both in terms of the vocabulary used and the attitude of the man described. Contrary to Pink and others who suggest that the cry of v. 24 is normal and persistent for the mature believer, Hoekema argues that ‘the mood of frustration and defeat which permeates Romans 7:13–25 does not comport with the mood of victory in terms of which Paul usually describes the normal life of the Christian’.”<sup>65</sup>

Again, Schreiner comments, “Nowhere do verses 14–25 mention the Holy Spirit, whereas chapter 8 refers to the Holy Spirit nineteen times. The impression given thereby is that the ‘I’ that attempts to but fails to keep God’s law lacks the resources of the Holy Spirit. The ‘I’ is cast upon its own resources and lacks the wherewithal to carry out God’s demands. How different is the portrait drawn of the Christian who possesses the Holy Spirit in chapter 8.”<sup>66</sup> The overt absence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in Romans 7:7-24 contrasted against their emphatic presence in chapter 8 strengthens the case against Augustinian view.

## THE GRAMMAR

Grammatical features and literary devices used to frame a discourse and its movements are particularly helpful to the interpretation process. As noted above, the task of interpretation, especially for Romans 7:13-25, is likely to end in some sort of stalemate if it does not move beyond the tallying of observations that seem to favor one side or the other. The context of the passage must determine and color all other observations. Next, grammatical features are important to help frame it. Several of the more significant grammatical features are listed below.

## PROMPT CONSTRUCTS

Paul repeats certain grammatical patterns that signal markers in the discourse. When a series of words or phrases are structured together in a recognizable pattern, it suggests a construct. Constructs are used syntactically and help to inform the interpretation process.

A clear pattern is repeated in the middle segment of the larger discourse (6:1–7:25). It is structured in the sequence of (a) question, (b) strong objection, and (c) explanation. This exact prompt construct occurs four times:

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<sup>65</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Romans 7:25b.

<sup>66</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 387–388.

1. **Romans 6:1-2**

(a) *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*

(b) By no means! (μὴ γένοιτο)

(c) [Explanation: 6:2-14]

2. **Romans 6:15**

(a) *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*

(b) By no means! (μὴ γένοιτο)

(c) [Explanation: 6:16-23]

3. **Romans 7:7**

(a) *What then shall we say? That the law is sin?*

(b) By no means! (μὴ γένοιτο)

(c) [Explanation: 7:7-12]

4. **Romans 7:13**

(a) *Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?*

(b) By no means! (μὴ γένοιτο)

(c) [Explanation: 7:13-25]

This construct serves as a prompt and signals a new section of explanation. These prompts are used to carry the argument along, giving a pattern for stating propositions and arranging supporting arguments. After each of these prompts, Paul engages in an explanation that spans one or more paragraphs. The context of both chapters 6 and 7 are framed by these prompts.

Important to the interpretation of Romans 7:13-25 is recognition of the final prompt construct. As noted above, it marks the head and thesis of all that follows in the remainder of Romans 7. This means that the soliloquy of the wretched man serves as part of the explanation to the question: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?” After the strong objection, “By no means!,” the propositional statement that frames the purpose of the passage is given: “It was sin, producing death in me through what is good” (7:13). So the wretched man passage is an illustration of a man who was brought to death because sin was producing death in him through the law.

This, in conjunction with the contextual observations above, presents strong exegetical evidence against the Augustinian view. There is no place grammatically for introducing an example of a Christian struggling with sin. It is foreign to the argument. It ignores, downplays, or tries to explain away the final prompt. The Augustinian view is forced to be inconsistent at this point in the discourse.

## STRUCTURAL MARKERS

Not only is the middle segment of the discourse framed by four prompt constructs, but it features two pairs of structural markers. The first pair corresponds to chapter 6 and the

second pair corresponds to the end of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8, as shown below.

A – Law increased sin, but *grace abounded* (5:20)

B – Sin reigned in death, but *grace reigns* through righteousness (5:21)

`A – Are we to continue in sin that *grace may abound*? (6:1-14)

`B – Are we to sin because we are not under law but *under grace*? (6:15-23)

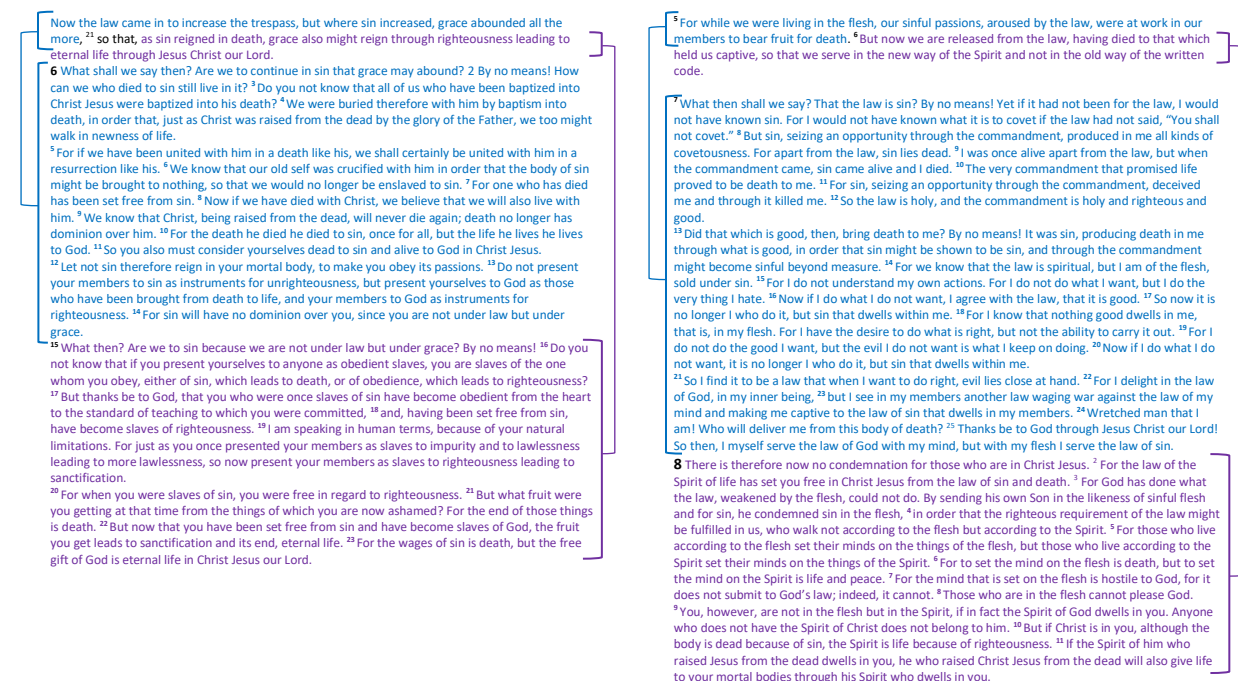
C – Sin exploits the law through the flesh to bring death (7:5)

D – Now we are released from the law in the Spirit (7:6)

`C – Sin exploits the law through the flesh to bring death (7:7-25)

`D – Now we are released from the law in the Spirit (8:2-11)

A visual representation of these structural markers may be rendered as follows:



The importance of such structural relationship within the discourse helps to establish markers of literary purpose within segments. Here again we see that Romans 7:14-25 is squarely situated in a block that corresponds to a propositional statement, namely, "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (7:5). Not only this, but it is immediately followed by a block that corresponds to the contrasting propositional statement, namely, "But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (7:6).

Both connections argue strongly against the Augustinian view. There is no room for the introduction of a struggling Christian here. The contrast between 7:5 and 7:6 is perfectly parallel to the contrast between the end of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. Colin



Kruse explains, “In 7:5 Paul spoke of life in the realm of the flesh, foreshadowing what he would expound in 7:7–25, where he insisted that the essential problem was not the law itself but sin. In 7:6 he spoke of life in the new way of the Spirit now made possible for believers because they have been released from the law. This foreshadows what the apostle expounds here in 8:1–13. It stands as a ‘negative counterpart’ to 7:7–25.”<sup>67</sup>

Those who hold the Augustinian view of 7:14–25 acknowledge that 7:5 is plainly speaking of an unregenerate man experiencing death because sin is aroused in his flesh by and through the law. Each of these exact elements are unmistakably present in 7:14–25, yet the Augustinian view fails to make the structural connection. As a result, the Augustinian view is forced, again, into inconsistency. These structural markers are fully consistent with the other observations made above and argue strongly against the Augustinian view.

## KEY CONJUNCTIONS

- Many argue for the Augustinian view on the basis of the verbal present tense observed through the passage (the present tense argument is addressed below). But grammatically syntactical relationships furnish a more concrete guide for interpretation. Verbal tense is more dynamic and stylistic than syntax. There is much less latitude with syntax.

There are a few key conjunctions in this part of the discourse that add to and reinforce the observations discussed above.

## CONNECTING “FOR” OF 7:14

Probably the conjunction that offers the most help in interpreting the passage is the “for” that heads 7:14 (“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin”). Sam Storms rightly observes, “All agree that vv. 7–13 describe pre-conversion experience. But many ignore the fact that Paul then immediately links this description (in vv. 7–13) to vv. 14–25 with a confirmatory ‘for’.”<sup>68</sup> Gundry suggests that “at this point we would have expected disjunction rather than linkage if Paul had meant to shift to Christian experience. As it is, he immediately announces that he is ‘fleshly’ (verse 14). This announcement recalls verse 5, ‘For when we were in the flesh,’ which because of the past tense and for the context of verses 1–6 clearly refers to the unregenerate state.”<sup>69</sup> Commenting with reference to 7:13, Heinrich Meyer notes that “the subject is in vv. 14–25 necessarily the same—and that, indeed, in its unredeemed condition—as previously gave its psychological *history* prior to

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<sup>67</sup> Colin Kruse, *Romans*, 322. So also the ESV Study Bible, “the structure of the passage (vv. 7–25 matches the life of the unregenerate previewed in v. 5, whereas 8:1–17 fits with the life of believers identified in 7:6)” (2169). Stifler comments on 8:4, saying, “It takes up the little phrase in chapter 7, ‘serve in newness of [the] spirit,’ and develops it. The opposite service mentioned there, ‘in the oldness of the letter,’ the law, is the theme of chapter 7” (Stifler, *Romans*, 140).

<sup>68</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b.

<sup>69</sup> Gundry, 236.

and under the law (hence the *preterites* in vv. 7–13), and now *depicts its position* confronting (δέ) the pneumatic nature of the law (hence the *presents* in ver. 14 ff.), in order to convey the information (γάρ), that not the law, but the principle of sin mighty in man himself, has prepared death for him.”<sup>70</sup>

The syntactical force of the “for” (γάρ) in 7:14 is an explanatory conjunction. Based on this, Schreiner notes, “Now if verses 14–25 provide an explanation for verse 13 and the latter refers to the unregenerate (and it does since it links death with experiencing the law), then it would follow that verses 14–25 refer to nonbelievers. ... Those who posit Christian experience do violence to the close-knit relationship between verses 13 and 14.”<sup>71</sup>

This conjunction also leaves no room for a shift in what is clearly accepted as Paul’s past, under the law, experience in 7:7–13. This argues strongly against the Augustinian view, since there is no change in the grammatical subject. The logic of the grammar demands continuity of thought. Not only this, but it serves to reinforce 7:13, explaining and thereby furnishing it a supporting argument. Schreiner connects this to the debate at hand by suggesting that “it seems antecedently unlikely that Paul would shift from the experience of the unregenerate to the regenerate when the primary topic of discussion is the law.”<sup>72</sup>

## THE “NOW” OF 7:6 AND 8:1

Another important feature in the grammar of the discourse is the use of “now” in 7:6 and 8:1. The “therefore” (ἄρα) of 8:1 (“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”), connects back to 7:6 (“But now we are released from the law”). Both also emphasize a contrast with “now” (see “Structural Markers” above). In both cases, “now” is generally accepted as marking a soteriological contrast (cf. 3:26; 5:9, 11; 6:19, 22; 7:6, 17).

This has implications for the interpretation of 7:14–25. Schreiner explains, “The emphatic νῦν (*nyn*, now) in 8:1 should be noted (Kümmel 1974: 69–70). The νῦν indicates that ‘now’ there is no condemnation for those in Christ; this seems to stand in contrast to the condemnation that existed for the person under the dominion of sin and the law in 7:14–25. The ἐγώ was previously under condemnation, but now that the person is in Christ he or she is right in God’s sight. A new period in salvation history has dawned and thus believers are freed from the condemnation of sin and the law.”<sup>73</sup> So, also, the emphatic “now” in 8:1 “would appear to point to a shift in experience from 7:7–25 to 8:1ff., i.e., a shift from the wretched,

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<sup>70</sup> Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 386.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 387.

unregenerate, frustrated man of Rom. 7 to the joyous, regenerate, victorious man of Rom. 8.”<sup>74</sup>

- Proponents of the Augustinian view sometimes seek to explain the emphasis and contrast of the “now” in 8:1 as a change in victory over sin rather than a soteriological change. But this fails to do justice to the grammar. Not only this, but the theme, tone, and language change so drastically with this “now” that it can hardly represent a shift in attitude, feeling, or personal experience while not at the same time reflect, as linked to, a change in one’s spiritual condition, understanding, and soteriological standing before God. In fact, 8:1 celebrates not a change in thinking, but a change in legal standing before God (“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”). Then, as noted above, the parallel “now” in 7:6 is undisputed as soteriological. To deny this in 8:1 is inconsistent with the unit structure and import of its grammar.

## DISCOURSE FORMULA

One more feature of grammar contributing to a discourse-based interpretation is what scholars call discourse “formula.” Richard Longenecker proves especially helpful in this analysis. Acknowledging the challenges associated with the typical approach to the controversy surrounding Romans 7:14-25, Longenecker argues, “Despite these rather obvious similarities of words and expressions, which serve to connect the passage with what precedes and what follows, the tone and temper of 7:14–25 are quite different from what precedes it and what follows it. So we propose that these formal features of an opening ‘disclosure formula’ in 7:14a and a ‘concluding formulation’ in 7:25b, coupled with the passage’s elliptical style, signal the discrete nature of what Paul writes in 7:14–25.”<sup>75</sup>

Certain grammatical features, some of which have been discussed in the sections above, constitute formulas that frame up what is called a discrete body of material. So, again, “Such formal features suggest that 7:14–25 is probably best understood as a discrete body of material that functions in its own right within its author’s overall purpose.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, “7:14–25 is a discrete unit of material, which is best understood as Paul’s ‘soliloquy’ or ‘dramatic monologue’ on the subject of ‘the tragic plight of people who attempt to live their lives apart from God, that is, by means of their own resources and abilities (‘under their own steam’).”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b.

<sup>75</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 651.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 659.

## DISCLOSURE FORMULA

While I have attempted to show above that grammatically 7:13 is explained in 7:14-25, the point here goes a step further. First, there is the disclosure formula. Longenecker explains, “This passage opens in 7:14a with the epistolary disclosure formula ‘we know that’ (οἶδμεν ὅτι). Such disclosure formulas were commonly used in antiquity to signal the start of a new section or subsection within the structure of a Greek letter.” He also notes, “Other epistolary ‘disclosure formulas’ in Romans appear in 2:2; 3:19; 6:3, 16; 7:1, 14; 8:22, 28 (probably also 8:18 and 26); and 11:25.”<sup>78</sup>

The first-person plural is used in the passage only at the very beginning and at the very end. As suggested, this signals Paul’s appeal to his audience to understand something critical to his soliloquy. In this case, it is the premise, “we know that the law is spiritual” (7:14). Likewise, at the very end he uses the first-person plural in a parenthetical statement, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25). These are the only two instances of the first-person plural in the passage, and together they form discourse markers. This suggests that these statements belong formally outside of the soliloquy, as parenthetical hooks.

- Proponents of the Augustinian view often point to 7:25 to argue that the “I” of the soliloquy is a Christian. After all, he gives thanks to God for Christ! But this argument fails to recognize the unique use of the first-person plural and its contrast to the rest of the soliloquy. It does not seem to distinguish between the voice in these parenthetical statements and the voice of the wretched man in the soliloquy.

Another argument often advanced in favor the Augustinian points out that Paul’s expression of thanks to God for Christ is anticlimactic, occurring before his concluding statement, “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (7:25). To some, this means “verse 25 describes, undeniably, Paul’s present experience.”<sup>79</sup> Harrison explains the situation by writing, “The end of the chapter, in terms of the text as it stands and without attempted rearrangement, acknowledges the deliverance in Christ yet goes on to state the very problem sketched in vv. 14–24 as though it continues to be a problem for one who knows the Lord.”<sup>80</sup> Moo articulates this argument well, “Paul immediately supplies the answer to the plea of v. 24b: ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Yet the chapter does not end on this triumphant note but returns to a final description of *egō* in conflict, as this has been delineated in vv. 15–23. This sequence is one of the most oft-cited arguments in favor of the view that Paul is describing Christian experience in 7:14–25. For Paul’s renewed confession of struggle, *after* the thanksgiving for

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<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 650.

<sup>79</sup> Bishopsgate, *Romans*, 134.

<sup>80</sup> Harrison, “Romans,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 126.

deliverance, suggests that the ‘divided’ *egō* is precisely that *egō* which knows that deliverance comes through God’s work in Christ.”<sup>81</sup> John Piper has argued, “Just when this view expects a triumphant statement about how the divided man is finally united in victory and beyond conflict and entirely under the sway of the Spirit, what do you get in the second half of verse 25? You get just what you would expect to get if Romans 7 is really about the frequent Christian experience of conflict and struggle. You get a summary statement of the struggling and divided life. It goes like this: ‘So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin’ (Romans 7:25). What an anticlimax if the intention is to say that there’s this decisive break between chapters 7 and 8.”<sup>82</sup>

But these arguments fail to appreciate certain discourse formulations, supporting the more sensible explanation, namely a parenthetic statement. Schreiner suggests, “That Paul interjected the solution to the problem in verses 24–25a before articulating the conclusion is hardly surprising, for he did not always write in the neat and tidy way we might expect. He could not restrain himself from exclaiming over the victory believers have in Christ.”<sup>83</sup> This is not uncommon in Paul (Romans 6:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:56-57; 2 Corinthians 2:13-14; etc.). Moo adds, “On the unregenerate view, it must be assumed that Paul, the Christian, has at this point interjected his own thanksgiving. And perhaps it could be argued that the use of the plural (‘our’) rather than the ‘I’ style of the surrounding context signals the presence of such an interjection.”<sup>84</sup> Robert Reymond clarifies how this applies to the debate, “a conclusion descriptive of the unconverted but deeply convicted Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, struggling to obey the law in his own power, with the preceding ‘Thanks be to God’ phrase (7:25a) being the regenerate Paul simply interjecting into the flow of his argument as he occasionally does an anacoluthonic praise statement from his vantage point as a Christian (e.g., Eph 2:5), highlighting where he found the solution to his struggle.”<sup>85</sup> “We may note that Paul’s closing exclamation of praise also has a confessional form, in which he returns to the use of the plural: ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ *our* Lord’ (Rom. 7:25).”<sup>86</sup>

## CONCLUDING FORMULATION

Another significant formulation is realized in the conclusion. Longenecker takes the above explanation a step further, pointing out that the “so then” (ἄρα οὖν) of 7:25 contrast the “therefore now” (ἄρα νῦν) of 8:1, as a threaded seam in the discourse: “the passage closes in 7:25b with the idiomatic concluding formulation ‘so then’ or ‘consequently’ (ἄρα οὖν), which

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<sup>81</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 466.

<sup>82</sup> John Piper, “Does Romans 7 Describe a Christian,” article at [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org).

<sup>83</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 386.

<sup>84</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 467.

<sup>85</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1129.

<sup>86</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*.

Paul uses elsewhere in Romans to indicate where a conclusion to an argument begins—or, at least, where an intermediate conclusion in his overall argument begins, as here at the end of Rom 7, with that intermediate concluding formulation ‘consequently’ of 7:25b being contrasted by the opposing formulation ‘nevertheless, therefore now’ (οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν) of 8:1a.”<sup>87</sup>

While not all grammatical features have been discussed, these are the most determinative in analysis of this discourse. The argument concerning Paul’s use of the present tense throughout the soliloquy will be addressed in the “Objections” section of the appendix. For now, the grammatical details join with the contextual to mount a strong case against the Augustinian view.

## THE ARGUMENT

Crucial to the interpretation of Romans 7:13-25 is the argument it supports. The discourse follows a line of argument. The argument has a ground and a goal, introduces problems, prompts with questions, and provides explanation with propositions and supporting arguments.

### ROMANS 5 – 8

After concluding his discourse on justification in Romans 1:16–4:25, Paul transitions into the discourse of which Romans 7 is a part.<sup>88</sup> This literary unit runs from the beginning of chapter 5 to the end of chapter 8. The coherence and unity in the progression of this discourse may be appreciated in the following outline:

A – **Security** (5:1-11)

B – **In Christ, not Adam** (5:12-21)

C – **Under grace, not Law** (6:1–7:25)

‘B – **In Spirit, not flesh** (8:1-27)

‘A – **Security** (8:28-39)

The chiasm helps in mapping out the larger argument. While it is often argued that the theme of this section is sanctification, we see that security in justification by faith alone because of Christ alone continues prominently throughout, marking its beginning and end. This too informs our understanding of Paul’s argument in the middle subunit (C), namely that our

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<sup>87</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 651.

<sup>88</sup> “There is a growing recognition among commentators today that the material of 5:1 is best understood as a transitional statement that builds on Section I of the body middle of the letter (i.e., on 1:16–4:25) and points forward to Section II (i.e., to 5:1–8:39)” (Richard N. Longenecker, *Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 553).

security does not allow for sin (6:1-23) and yet is not found in obedience to the Mosaic law (7:1-25).

## GROUNDING CHAPTER 7

Romans 5 marks the beginning of this section with a distinct delineation: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1). The chapter rehearses some of the benefits of justification, compares the headship of Christ and Adam, and closes with an interplay between law and grace. At this point Paul states that “the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:20) so that “grace also might reign ... through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21). This double theme (grace *abounding* and *reigning*) frames chapter 6 (6:1, 15). To prompt his explanation of grace reigning, Paul asks, “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). Twice he says that he who is justified by faith in Christ is no longer “under law but under grace” (6:14, 15). But he does not explain why they are not “under law.” Chapter 7, then, explains why.

## THE ARGUMENT OF CHAPTER 7

The argument entering chapter 7 is grounded in the justified man being in union with Christ and under grace. For this reason, they are not under the Mosaic law. The problem being addressed in this chapter has at least two major parts: (a) Paul has not yet explained why being in Christ and under grace is mutually exclusive with being under the Mosaic law, and (b) the gospel seems to cast only a negative light on the Mosaic law and that could be misleading. The goal of chapter 7 and the message it opens with advances the understanding that in Christ there is a glorious new way to serve God, namely through the promised Holy Spirit (7:6).

### (A) NOT UNDER MOSAIC LAW

First, the Christian is not under the Old Covenant law. This was introduced in “The Context” section above.

Paul is “speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives” (7:1). He illustrates his point with a marriage analogy, namely that a marriage covenant is annulled upon the death of a spouse. He then asserts that all who have died with Christ (6:8) are in Him and have therefore with Him “died to the law” (7:4). In a similar way, the Old Covenant has been annulled through the death of Christ. All who are joined to Him are joined under another covenant. Thus, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (7:6). Being “captive” to the Old Covenant law is a problem that Romans 7 is addressing.

## (B) DEFENSE OF THE MOSAIC LAW

Second, Paul's language has been seemingly severe, and could potentially be taken as dishonoring and disrespecting God's holy law. The remainder of chapter 7 addresses this charge.

Craig Keener notes, "Paul's analogous treatment of freedom from sin (6:12–23) and the law (7:1–6) raises the obvious objection: is Paul identifying the law with sin (7:7)?"<sup>89</sup> The law is said to bring the knowledge of sin (3:20), increase sin (5:20), and arouse sinful passions (7:5). This begs the question: "if the law stirs up my sinfulness, then is the law to blame for my condition? No. My problem is my own sinful nature, which the law exposes to plain view."<sup>90</sup> Schreiner helpfully connects both arguments (not under the law, yet the law is good):

The apology for the law here, however, must be interpreted in light of the whole of Romans. This topic is probably introduced so that Paul can defend his gospel against Jewish objections that it compromises the holiness of the Torah (cf. Seifrid 1992: 226–27). But Paul does more than this. He also demonstrates that human beings are not freed from sin's dominion while living under the domain of the law. The promises made to Israel have come to fruition not through the Torah but through the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup>

The major aspects of this argument will be outlined under the headings that follow.

## GOD'S LAW IS GOOD, MAN IS SINFUL

In Romans 7:7-25, Paul is clearly arguing in defense of God's law and in prosecution of man's sin.<sup>92</sup> His argument is framed by two prompts: "What then shall we say? That the law is sin?" (7:7), and "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?" (7:13). His summary answer esteems the law in no uncertain terms, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (7:12). Morris rightly comments, "Paul leaves the reader in no doubt about the high place he assigns to the law even if he emphatically rejects it as a way of salvation."<sup>93</sup>

The problem, then, is not the law but sin. This is the head and thesis of Romans 7:13-25. The passage opens with these words, "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure"

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<sup>89</sup> Craig Keener, *Romans*, 89.

<sup>90</sup> Ortlund, *A passion for God*, 100.

<sup>91</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 359.

<sup>92</sup> "He finds that the problem is not with the law, but with human beings themselves. The trouble is that they are carnal, made of flesh that is weak, and prone to succumb to attacks of sin, which dwells within them." (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 472).

<sup>93</sup> Morris, *Romans*, 283.



(7:13). The “wretched man” soliloquy that follows is in the direct line of arguing this point (see “The Grammar” below).

Again, answering the question, “Who is the wretched man of Romans 7,” is first a matter of understanding the argument. The wretched man serves as a punctuating illustration, supporting the argument that being “captive” to the Mosaic law (7:6, 14, 25) leads only to frustration and death because sin exploits the law (7:13, 17, 20, 23, 25) through the weakness of the flesh (7:9, 11, 13, 14; 8:2-3). This explains not only observations made within the passage but its place and purpose in the argument.

## DOES THE LAW BRING DEATH?

Leading up to the soliloquy, Paul says, “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me” (7:10). This prepares the prompt of 7:13 (“Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?”). Schreiner writes, “In verse 13 Paul inquires whether the law is the cause of death. He emphatically rejects such a conclusion in verses 14–25, contending that the death of the ‘I’ is due to the power of sin, which overwhelms the desire to keep God’s law. The goodness of the law is vindicated, but the power of sin over the ‘I’ is also demonstrated.”<sup>94</sup> Later, he delineates, “Sin is the *ultimate* cause of death. The law is the *instrumental* cause, but it is not itself blameworthy, for it is inherently good.”<sup>95</sup> He points out that 7:14 adds to this, “The law is vindicated since it is ‘spiritual’ (πνευματικός, *pneumatikos*, v. 14). The reason death occurs is that the ‘I’ (ἐγώ, *egō*) is ‘fleshly’ (σάρκινος, *sarkinos*) and sold under sin. ... The reason the law is transgressed is not because it is flawed or unspiritual but because human beings are fleshly and under the control of sin.”<sup>96</sup> Douglas Moo also observes,

How was it possible for sin to use the law to bring death to ‘me’? Is ‘sin’ a power, outside a person, that can arbitrarily bring to pass so disastrous a state of affairs? Not at all, Paul affirms in vv. 14–20, for sin dwells ‘in me.’ ‘I’ am ultimately at fault; certainly not the law, not even sin. It is ‘me’ and my ‘carnality,’ my helplessness under sin, that enables sin to do what it does. ‘Sin’ has invaded my existence and made me a divided person, willing to do what God wants but failing to do it.<sup>97</sup>

Leon Morris reminds us that “Paul is establishing the point that the law does not in practice function as a means of salvation. Rather, it is a means of establishing people’s guilt. It gives them something to sin against and in this way is an ally of sin. The commandment is aimed at our good, but it is quite possible for us to view it as a limitation on our freedom. Seen in

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<sup>94</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 356.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 372.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, 373.

<sup>97</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 451.

that light it becomes a cause of resentment and opposition.”<sup>98</sup> William Griffith agrees and shows how this fits the discourse and the flow of the contextual argument:

The Apostle here continues his subject and confirms the preceding argument by showing the power of sin in the flesh. It is this that makes the law weak. No one can be saved by law, because law cannot deliver us from the flesh. Law only prescribes, it cannot perform; it proscribes, but does not provide. Just as in ch. 3:20, he showed that law could not justify, so here he proves the additional truth, that it cannot sanctify. It can neither give acceptance (justification), nor acceptableness (sanctification). The law cannot give holiness, because the flesh is the seat of sin.<sup>99</sup>

The theme of death is antithetical to the gospel. The whole discourse, from the beginning of chapter 5 through the end of chapter 8, portrays the gospel as powerfully brining life through union with Christ who ever lives. When the Christian is related to sin it is always in terms like those presented in 6:11, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (see also 8:2, 6).

## THE GREAT WICKEDNESS OF SIN

An adjunct aim in Paul’s argument is to highlight the great wickedness of sin. This is plainly argued in the thesis statement, “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure” (7:13). Charles Ferme suggests that “the extreme malignity of sin is manifested by his teaching in this way, because his teaching shews that sin produces evil out of good, that is, work for us both every sort of sin, and, in fine, death, by occasion of the law.”<sup>100</sup> Gerhard Kittel notes, “Using God’s holy will to enhance its power, sin has a demonic quality (Rom. 7:13), enslaving us (7:14) and handing us over to death, so that we cannot fulfil the law (7:15ff.; cf. Eph. 2:1). The law, however, still discharges its holy function by unmasking sin.”<sup>101</sup>

The Augustinian view does not adequately account for the weight of this ancillary argument. The heinousness of sin is being highlighted. Its direct link to death is stressed. Its exploitation of the law constitutes the whole undercurrent of thought in the argument. Therefore, the wretched man is seen to both delight in God’s law (7:22) and yet cry, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24). This line of argumentation is quite incompatible with a supposed appeal to the normal Christian life. The soliloquy is not purposed to simply warn Christians against the great wickedness of sin, rather it illustrates sin’s heinousness in

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<sup>98</sup> Morris, *Romans*, 280.

<sup>99</sup> Griffith, *Romans*, 190–191.

<sup>100</sup> Ferme, *A Logical Analysis of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 104.

<sup>101</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 50.

showing how sin uses the holy and good law to bring about death instead of life. The argument simply does not afford any place for Christian examples.

## THE LAW IS HOLY AND HELPLESS

Having established that man's wicked sin is the culprit rather than God's good law, the point of the law's helplessness is another feature of the argument. Succinctly stated, "The problem is not the law, but the flesh's inability to fulfill it (7:5, 14, 18, 25; 8:3–8)."<sup>102</sup> Again, "Paul counters the view that the law can function as the agent of transformation, for those who lived under the law were unable to keep it."<sup>103</sup>

Paul Barnett connects this segment to the overall argument, "So what has Paul been teaching in 5:12–7:25? In brief, it is that Sin and Death entered history in and with Adam with devastating effect to all his descendants. To (Christian) Jews among his original hearers Paul is saying that law cannot rescue man from Sin and Death, but that only Jesus Christ crucified but risen does that—but in an ultimate, not immediate, sense."<sup>104</sup> More precisely focused on Romans 7:13–25, Moo notes that "Paul, reflecting his own experience, focuses in this passage on a 'pious' Jew—one who took his religion seriously and sought to do what was required of him. Taking as his example the 'best' in the non-Christian world, Paul reveals the utter helplessness of the person apart from Christ who has nothing but his 'works' on which to rely for salvation."<sup>105</sup>

Romans 7 is continuing an argument. The argument does not appeal to Christian experience. Rather, it centers on the place and powerlessness of the Mosaic law. Advocates of the ► Augustinian view sometimes argue that the context does not allow for any reintroduction or discussion about the unregenerate. For example, "I don't believe this passage refers to an unsaved person. The flow of Paul's argument from chapter 6 to chapter 8 does not permit introducing an unbeliever into the context."<sup>106</sup> Again, "The progress of thought in Romans needs to be taken into consideration. Paul has passed beyond his description of the unsaved state and is now giving attention to sanctification and its problems; so the theme here is really relevant only to believers."<sup>107</sup> But this line of reasoning fails to trace the argument. It treats the passage more like an article in a systematic catalog of theology rather than as a

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<sup>102</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 89.

<sup>103</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 358.

<sup>104</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 165–166.

<sup>105</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 461.

<sup>106</sup> Kroll, *Romans*, 112.

<sup>107</sup> Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 126. Some appeal to "Paul's main argument" but are far too general, failing to show how their position fits into both the immediate and larger discourse: "Romans 7:7–25 is not parenthetical to Paul's main argument but is in the context of his discussion of the *Christian* life which covers chps. 6–8. If this paragraph is Paul's description of the unbeliever's struggle with the Law, it 'becomes an unnecessary interruption and digression in Paul's train of thought, much more suited to the context of Rom. 2–3 than that of 6–8' (Dunn, 260)" (Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b).

subunit serving an argument within a larger discourse. It also selectively ignores the repeated references to the unsaved, even the old self, within chapters 6 through 8 (6:6, 19-20; 7:5, 8-11; 8:5, 6, 7-8, 13). D. A. Carson identifies any such appeal to the use of selective evidence as an exegetical fallacy. He warns that when exegetical evidence is used selectively other evidence is illegitimately excluded. He goes on to suggest, “As a general rule, the more complex and/or emotional the issue, the greater the tendency to select only part of the evidence, prematurely construct a grid, and so filter the rest of the evidence through the grid that it is robbed of any substance.”<sup>108</sup> To preclude an illustration from an unregenerate “old self” presupposes the exegesis on artificial grounds and not on the basis of the argument. Schreiner aptly remarks, “Those who posit Christian experience bring the experience of believers to the center stage of the argument when the main theme is the goodness, albeit powerlessness, of the law. We must not forget that Paul’s main argument here is against Jews who would claim that the law is the key to one’s relationship with God. Paul argues that the law cannot produce righteousness, even if it is good and spiritual.”<sup>109</sup>

Again, the discourse follows a line of argument. That argument is primarily concerned with the Mosaic law and secondarily fallen flesh. While the Mosaic law is holy and good, New Covenant saints are released from it in Christ. Also argued is the point that while holy, it is helpless. The law is not an agent of transformation, it is an agent of death through the power of sin resident in fallen flesh. As we will see later, the gospel celebrates the wonder of God condemning sin in the flesh in Christ (8:3). Those united to Christ, by the Holy Spirit, are then set free from the condemnation linked with fallen flesh (a reality introduced in chapter 5 relating to all in Adam). Paul’s soliloquy, then, serves his argument concerning the place and powerlessness of the law. Showcasing a Christian struggle with sin is foreign to the argument. The Augustinian view misses both concerns and thus does not fit the argument.

## STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

Pulling these grammatical and disputational details together helps in forming a structural outline, which affords greater clarity on the immediate and surrounding contexts and the flow of the argument within the discourse. A primary purpose of this part of the analysis is to show more clearly the logic of the overall argument. The following structural outline for Romans 5–8 includes annotation that summarizes the flow of the argument.

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<sup>108</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 93.

<sup>109</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 386.

#### **A – SECURITY (5:1-11)**

Those justified by faith have peace with God and are secure with Christ, the guarantor of glory. All this is realized in the demonstration of God's love through Christ.

#### **B – IN CHRIST, NOT ADAM (5:12-21)**

Sin and condemnation came through Adam, now all in Adam die. Grace and righteousness came through Christ, now all in Christ live.

*Transition (5:20-21): The law entered not for righteousness but to expose unrighteousness. Yet grace through Christ abounds over sin.*

#### **C – UNDER GRACE, NOT LAW (6:1-7:25)**

Grace both abounds and reigns for the Christian (6:1, 15). The Christian is not under the law of sin and death, but rather under grace and life (6:3-14). Neither are Christians slaves to the law (6:14, 15). They are slaves to the Lord, being united to Christ (6:17-18, 22).

Under grace, the Christian is set free from the Old Covenant law (7:4). The Old Covenant law belongs to the former age, the age of the flesh, and the law only provokes the flesh to sin which leads to death (7:5). But Christians are released from the Old Covenant law to serve as a slave to God in a New Covenant, namely through the newness of the Holy Spirit and not according to the Old Covenant written code (7:6).

But this does not mean that the Old Covenant law is to blame (7:7, 12). The law serves its purpose by exposing sin, not eradicating it (7:8). Yet sin exploits the law to work in and through the flesh to produce death (7:9-11). Now, again, the law is not to be blamed for the death that sin brings (7:13). Rather, sin is the culprit, being a tyrant working in the flesh to overpower a person's will and produce death (7:14-21). Clinging to the law will not deliver anyone from the tyranny of sin (7:22-23). Being a slave to the law will never deliver from the slavery of sin (7:25). Finally, then, the only end of those who are under law is death (7:24). So while the law is not to blame for sin, it is certainly not a means for righteousness. Christians must not subject themselves to the yoke of slavery under the law because they are under grace.

#### **‘B – IN SPIRIT, NOT FLESH (8:1-27)**

The New Covenant has come in Christ. A new age has dawned. Sinners are now justified in Christ and sanctified in the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 opens and closes presenting Christ as the ground and goal of the gospel. And it uniquely features

the Holy Spirit as the sign and seal, power and preserver, liberator and leader of all in Christ. A fleshly life is diametrically opposed to the Spirit.

#### `A – **SECURITY** (8:28-39)

Suffering and the death of our mortal bodies are no measure of the security that we have in Christ. Now we see that not only Christ, but the Spirit is the guarantor of glory. Come what may, Christians are secure in Christ through the Spirit all flowing from the love of God.

Romans 7:13-25 is situated in the latter part of the middle segment of the discourse. It serves the purpose of reinforcing the argument that Christians are under grace, not law. It ties in the elements of sin, the flesh, and death, illustrating through intimate personal experience just how contrary life in the flesh under the law is to the Christian way of life in the Spirit under the grace of the gospel. It would be perfectly fitting, then, for Paul to support his argument by putting on display a man in the flesh, under the law of sin and death, and under the Old Covenant law struggling and despairing without hope. This fits his argument seamlessly. In contrast, the Augustinian view simply does not fit the flow of the argument. The idea of a Christian overpowered by sin while trying to obey the Old Covenant is contradictory to Paul's purpose here.

### THE PROBLEM–SOLUTION PRINCIPLE

Romans 7:13-25 presents a problem that anticipates a solution. This is highly instructive to the interpretation of the passage. The problem involves **death** (7:13), its **cause** (7:13), **sin** (7:13), accusations against the **Mosaic law** (7:5, 7, 13), **fleshliness** (7:14), **enslavement** (7:14, 23), **powerlessness** (7:18), and **condemnation** (7:24).

The solution to the overall problem and each item is provided in chapter 8. The problem of **death** is answered by “the Spirit of life” (8:2). Sin working in the flesh is identified as the **cause** of death and is answered by God condemning sin in the flesh of Christ (8:3). **Sin** itself is resolved in the sacrifice of Christ, who was sent “for sin” (8:3). The **Mosaic law** is exonerated, being itself not guilty as charged but rather “weakened by the flesh”—sinful flesh is proven to be the culprit (8:3). Sinful **fleshliness** is answered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (8:4, 9-11). **Enslavement** is resolved by the freedom that the Spirit brings in Christ (8:2). The **powerlessness** of the flesh is answered by the powerfulness of the Holy Spirit (8:3, 7-11). And the condition of **condemnation** is answered by the resounding opening statement of chapter 8, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Christ Himself applied and maintained through the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the all-encompassing solution. The glaring absence of the Holy Spirit in the passage and the uniquely abundant repetition of Him in chapter 8 is key to the problem-solution paradigm.

The same is true for Christ. There is not a single mention or allusion to Christ in Romans 7:7-24. The absence of Christ is the underlying problem. Romans 8 extols Christ as the solution in no less than nine explicit times (8:1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 17, 34, 35, 39).

Again, the solution is announced in the words, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). This statement is soteriological (dealing with salvation) and is provided in Christ through the Spirit (8:1-4). Since the nature of the solution is soteriological it follows that the nature of the problem is as well. And this is plainly confirmed by the fact that the problem involves sin, death, and condemnation.

It is remarkable how expositors who hold to the Augustinian view, in commentaries and in sermons, deal with Romans 8. Rightly, they preach and write with exuberance over the glorious and abiding grace that God has given the redeemed in Christ through the Spirit. They speak eloquently of assurance and security, of power and holiness, of life and hope. And the soundest of these will be sure to warn against the idea of two different classes of Christians. But how then does the “wretched man” (7:24) reconcile with the child and heir of God (8:17), who cries, not “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24), but rather “Abba! Father! ... Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died ... who indeed is interceding for us” (8:15, 34)?

The problem-solution principle lifts the interpreter out of any tendency to be isolated in the passage in order to appreciate the discourse and its argument. The arguments that Paul presents fundamentally suppose a problem and a solution. The interpreter of Romans 7:13-25 must give substantial consideration to this dynamic if he is going to be faithful to the author’s design.

## THE PERSONA

Up to this point, I have focused on the discourse features framing and connecting to Romans 7:14-25 within its larger discourse. Now we will turn to consider the passage itself. I will limit our investigation to the manifest details of the persona<sup>110</sup> as revealed in the passage.

The statements made by the persona in the soliloquy are intended to help explain 7:13. I have tried to show above that the discourse at this point is concerned with (a) the deprecation of the Mosaic law and (b) sin exploiting the law through fallen flesh leading to death. First, while the Mosaic law is holy and good, New Covenant saints are released from it in Christ. Second, while the law is holy, it is also helpless. The law is not an agent of transformation, it is an agent of death through the power of sin resident in fallen flesh. Each categorical statement made by the persona supports these arguments and contributes to them by way of example.

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<sup>110</sup> Defined by Oxford English Dictionary as “a character deliberately assumed by an author in his writing.”

## CARNAL

The persona says, “I am of the flesh” (7:14). This is stated in direct contrast to, “the law is spiritual” (literally, “of the Spirit”). The contrast cannot be any clearer. This is a perfect set up to show that the law is not at fault in the persona’s struggle and death.

- Proponents of the Augustinian view argue that “Paul is speaking not as a man who is spiritually dead but as a child of God who has been enlightened by his Word. He not only understands what is right but he accepts it and wants to do it. The trouble is that he cannot do what he wants because there is a law of sin and death at work in him that has a mind of its own and acts according to its own principles. This is what Paul calls the ‘flesh’ because it is the sum total of our human inheritance from Adam and Eve.”<sup>111</sup> This assumption has given rise to the acceptances of the “carnal Christian.” Lewis Chafer, for instance, relies heavily on the Augustinian view of this passage to support his teaching on the carnal Christian:

The term *carnal* is thus seen to be a description of the spiritual estate of a Christian who is dominated by the flesh rather than by the Spirit of God. He is one who is ‘walking’ after the flesh. In the same context (Rom. 7:14–25) in which he declares himself to be *flesh* (7:18), the Apostle asserts, ‘but I am carnal, sold under sin’ (7:14). This portion of the Scriptures—so personal in character—is presented by the Apostle as an example of the conflict which is developed by the presence of the flesh in the one who is saved.<sup>112</sup>

Haldane argues that although the persona says that he is of the flesh, “it does not imply that he was not regenerated, but shows what he was even in his renewed state, so far as concerned anything that was natural to him. Every Christian in this sense is carnal; in himself he is corrupt.”<sup>113</sup>

But these arguments quite miss the point. Paul is not seeking to show how Christians are carnal. He will soon argue precisely the opposite (8:6, 7, 8, 9). This introductory statement sets the stage for the example that exonerates the law and accuses sin in the flesh.

The adjective (*sarkinos*) alone is insufficient to decisively describe a man’s condition before God. It is used twice to speak of that which is human apart from any moral connotation (2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 7:16). The only other time the word is used in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 3:1 where it denotes Christians in terms of their moral weakness and lack of maturity, described as “infants in Christ.” Context determines its meaning. So with Moo, we agree that “it is clear that this adjective itself does not require that the *egō* [persona] be unregenerate. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that v. 5, which anticipates the argument of 7:7–25, describes the non-Christian state as being ‘in the flesh.’”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Bray, *God Is Love*, 407–408.

<sup>112</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 190.

<sup>113</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, 296–297.

<sup>114</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 454.



David Garland points out that “the adjective ‘fleshly’ refers to the substance out of which he is made. He describes his anthropological condition (cf. Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:22). He is made of flesh and blood and, therefore, is ‘congenitally at odds with God’s law’, which is ‘spiritual’.”<sup>115</sup> Principles of Romans 5 may well surface here. Barnett writes, “The contrast is clear. Law is ‘spiritual’ but I am ‘fleshly’. The related word ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) appeared in verse 5 and will become dominant at 7:18–8:13. ‘Flesh’ describes the spiritually ‘fallen’ condition of Adam and his tribe. This condition of ‘flesh’ is no light thing.”<sup>116</sup> C. K. Barrett admits that for the persona to say that he is of the flesh, he is saying, “I am determined by flesh, humanity that has decided that it has no room for God (8:7).”<sup>117</sup> So also Meyer argues that “of the flesh” (*sarkinos*) used in 7:14 is derived from “flesh” (*sarx*), which is “the material phenomenal nature of man.” He goes on to say that this part of man is characteristically portrayed as fallen and thus opposed to God. As a result, “of the flesh” affirms that the persona is of a non-spiritual nature and quality.<sup>118</sup> Thus, Reymond rightly argues, “The man describes himself as ‘carnal’ (σάρκινός, *sarkinos*; 7:14), which according to 8:6 is descriptive of the state of spiritual death.”<sup>119</sup>

This quality of the persona fits precisely with what we should expect in the discourse. The persona is an example of a man “living in the flesh,” with his “sinful passions, aroused by the law,” working in his “members to bear fruit for death” (7:5). The Augustinian view must explain this quality away as immaturity or a simple reference to his humanity, all the while failing to acknowledge that before and after this part of the discourse, flesh is associated with Adam, sin, and death. In contrast, Romans 5–8 repeatedly portrays the Christian as identified in Christ, righteousness, and life.

## ENSLAVED TO SIN

We come now to a point that is especially devastating to the Augustinian view. The persona declares himself a slave of sin. Yet this is a barefaced contradiction to the discourse. Not only does it contradict what Paul has taught in chapter 6, it ignores the progress of his argument. The following statements should overshadow all that we now read in chapter 7:

- “so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (6:6).
- “has been set free from sin” (6:7).
- “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (6:12).
- “sin will have no dominion over you” (6:14).
- “you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient” (6:17).

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<sup>115</sup> Garland, *Romans*, 244.

<sup>116</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 162.

<sup>117</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Romans*, 137.

<sup>118</sup> Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*, 14–15.

<sup>119</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1128.

- “having been set free from sin” (6:18).
- “when you were slaves of sin” (6:20).
- “you have been set free from sin” (6:22).

Enslavement to sin runs entirely contrary to Paul’s point before and after this passage. Indeed, in stark contrast to the end of chapter 7, chapter 8 opens with a celebratory conclusion, “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (8:2). Herman Ridderbos is worth quoting at length here:

It is said to believers in Romans 6:12 that sin may not (continue to) reign in their mortal bodies, etc. All this points to enduring battle, struggle, resistance of the flesh against the Spirit. But the absolute distinction between these and similar pronouncements and the portrayal of Romans 7 is that the former are spoken within the possibility and certainty of victory (see Rom. 6:14: ‘for sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under law, but under grace’; Gal. 5:24: ‘but they that are of Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts’), while in Romans 7 everything is directed toward throwing light on man’s situation of death, his having been sold under sin, his having been taken captive by the superior power of sin.<sup>120</sup>

The persona’s enslavement is expressed in several statements. Each will be discussed below.

### “SOLD UNDER SIN” (7:14)

This clause “clinches the argument for a description of a non-Christian here.”<sup>121</sup> The word used for “sold” (πῑπράσκω) denotes the sale of slave (cf. Matthew 18:25). It is translated variously as, “sold into bondage to sin” (NASB), “sold as a slave to sin” (NIV), and “sold into sin’s power” (CSB). It is here presented as a perfect passive participle, which indicates that the selling has happened to him and that it is something that has been accomplished in the past with continuing results.

Proponents of the Augustinian view are strained to soften and qualify the force of this statement. One writes, “This aspect [the flesh] of the Christian remains ‘a slave to sin’, belonging still to the realm of sin and death (vv. 14, 25).”<sup>122</sup> Nowhere is the Christian said to be so divided, part enslaved to sin and part free. The slavery and death of this passage is the result of enslavement of the persona to sin, not merely his material constitution. It is the “I” that sins, not his physical flesh. The adjective (“fleshly”) serves not to establish some anthropological dualism, but to describe the characteristic of the persona. In the end, it is the whole persona who sins, who is wretched, and who is under the sentence of death.

It is often argued that the “flesh” is just another way of describing the body in distinction to the soul. After all, goes the argument, the regenerate Christian does live within an

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<sup>120</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 127, cited by Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1130.

<sup>121</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 454.

<sup>122</sup> Bishopsgate, *Romans*, 137-8.

unredeemed body (8:23). Accordingly, some argue that the slavery and death referred to in the passage only refer to the outer man, and therefore picture the Christian's anticipation of resurrection. But this is contradicted by the legal exclamation that is pronounced in answer to the enslavement of the persona, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Appealing to statements made later in chapter 8 are in contradistinction, not continuity, to chapter 7 and can only be an example of special pleading.

The enslavement and its resulting "body of death" cannot be relegated to the outer man of a Christian since the whole Christian has been set "free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (8:2). This is the grounding of the Christian's hope of future resurrection, namely that his body too has the hope of redemption through the Holy Spirit, though not yet realized (8:11, 23). This is not the perspective of the persona. Hope is not in his heart. Moreover, the persona cried that he was made "captive to the law of sin" dwelling in his flesh (7:23), yet for the Christian God has "condemned sin in the flesh" (8:3). This discloses the solution to the problem of 7:23. That being said, the gospel does not deny that the body of the regenerate remains subject to the "wasting away" of this realm (2 Corinthians 4:16). But wasting away along with the groaning of "the whole creation" (8:22) has more to do with an already-not-yet renewal of the physical created order than with enslavement to sin and its resulting penalty of death.

Charles Hodge, in his otherwise excellent commentary on Romans, tries to soften the persona's slavery to sin:

He does not intend to say that he was given up to the willing service of sin; but that he was in the condition of a slave, whose acts are not always the evidence of his inclination. His will may be one way, but his master may direct him another. So it is with the believer. He does what he hates, and omits to do what he approves, ver. 15. This is a description of slavery, and a clear explanation of what is intended by the expression "sold under sin."<sup>123</sup>

John Calvin is much more consistent in his comments on this statement:

We are so entirely controlled by the power of sin, that the whole mind, the whole heart, and all our actions are under its influence. Compulsion I always except, for we sin spontaneously, as it would be no sin, were it not voluntary. But we are so given up to sin, that we can do willingly nothing but sin; for the corruption which bears rule within us thus drives us onward. Hence this comparison does not import, as they say, a forced service, but a voluntary obedience, which an inbred bondage inclines us to render.<sup>124</sup>

Robert Reymond succinctly captures the point when he writes, "The man says of himself that he has been 'sold as a slave [*πεπραμένος, pepramenos*] to sin' (7:14), that is, he is a slave of sin, which is descriptive only of the unregenerate man."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Charles Hodge, *A commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 356–357.

<sup>124</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 261.

<sup>125</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1128.

One last pertinent observation remains. Schreiner observes Paul's use of "under" and concludes that it is characteristically used of unbelievers.

For Paul to say that believers are ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (*hypo tēn hamartian*, under sin, v. 14) is also incredible. Paul consistently uses negative ὑπὸ phrases to denote unbelievers and the old era in salvation history; nowhere does it refer to believers (cf. B. Martin 1981: 44). Both Jews and Greeks are 'under sin' (Rom. 3:9) and therefore liable to judgment (3:19–20). Believers are 'not under law' (6:14–15) but 'under grace.' ... In sum, since 'under' phrases refer consistently to nonbelievers and the era of salvation history before the coming of Christ, it is likely that the phrase 'under sin' in Rom. 7:14 also relates to the unbelieving Paul, who is a slave to sin and has not experienced the new covenant work of the Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

The language is clear. The persona is sold as a slave of sin, under sin. His agonizing cry at the end of the chapter is not the voice of a Christian, rather it is the desperation of one captive to sin and its dreadful consequences despite all efforts to obey the law. This proves to be a fitting illustration of 7:5. The Augustinian view is here forced to contradict the plain meaning of words.

### "I DO NOT UNDERSTAND MY OWN ACTIONS" (7:15)

This clause speaks less of confusion and more of enslavement. The word translated "understand" (γινώσκω) can be rendered as "acknowledge, approve."<sup>127</sup> The Authorized Version and the Geneva Version rendered it, "allow," while Young's Literal Translation renders it "acknowledge."

The persona issues a confession that he is not in control of himself. The point of this statement highlights his enslavement to sin. His actions follow an authority other than the law that he pursues with his mind. Accordingly, he does not necessarily approve of the things that he finds himself doing.

This fits the thesis well (7:5, 11, 13). He is not in control, instead another authority is at work in his members, producing within him sin and bearing fruit for death. It is interesting that in the Ancient Christian Commentary series, Gerald Bray writes, "Most of the Fathers believed that here Paul was adopting the persona of an unregenerate man, not describing his own struggles as a Christian. As far as they were concerned, becoming a Christian would deliver a person from the kind of dilemma the apostle is outlining here."<sup>128</sup>



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<sup>126</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 389.

<sup>127</sup> "By οὐ γινώσκω Paul can hardly mean 'I do not know'; for the subject of the verb knows only too well what he does. It is not much more likely that the meaning is 'I do not understand'; for the subject of the verb is depicted in vv. 15–24 as having a very clear comprehension of his position. The best explanation is along the lines of the sense 'acknowledge' (cf. the use of γινώσκειν of a father's acknowledging a child as his own)—so 'I do not acknowledge', that is, 'I do not approve', 'I do not condone'." (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 358–359)."

<sup>128</sup> Bray, *Romans* in ACCS, 189–190.

In contrast, the Augustinian view appeals to Christian experience here, emphasizing frustration with the remaining propensity to sin. But the emphasis here expresses more than mere frustration. Its meaning is developed in what follows.

### “I DO NOT DO WHAT I WANT” (7:15)

The statement, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (7:15), is the cry of an enslaved will. He may want to do what is right but realizes he is not in control. His willpower is no match for the power of sin that enslaves him.

The complaint represented here is well known among the Greek philosophers. Keener says, “The sort of struggle depicted in 7:14–25 would resonate with many people in antiquity. Some philosophers depicted the struggle between reason and the body’s passions, an image relevant here (especially 7:22–23).”<sup>129</sup> Ben Witherington notes that “Paul has couched the discussion in a way that his largely Gentile audience could identify with. Consider ... Epictetus, who says that the sinner does not wish to sin and that the thief does not do what he wishes and does what he does not wish (2.26.1–4). ‘What I wish, I do not do, and what I do not wish, I do’ (2.26.4).”<sup>130</sup> Keener adds that “some of Paul’s language fits the portrayal of pathetic enslavement to passion in Greek sources (most often compared with wicked Medea’s or Phaedra’s submission to passion rather than reason). Paul’s application of the language in this context, however, shockingly applies to a pious Jew trying to observe God’s law.”<sup>131</sup>

Longenecker points out that “important studies have also focused on (1) parallels of content and expression between 7:14–25 and certain Greco-Roman tragic soliloquies regarding the lack of personal self-mastery and (2) parallels of rhetorical technique, particularly those of a ‘speech in character,’ between 7:14–25 and speeches that appear in a number of extant ancient monologues, soliloquies, addresses, and dialogues.”<sup>132</sup> As a result certain parallels have been identified. A couple more pointed examples are worth citing.

**Euripides:** “During long nights I have often thought about what wrecks our human life. I do not think that lack of understanding is the root of all evil. Most people lack nothing by way of insight. Rather, the cause must lie elsewhere: We know and recognize the good, but we do not do it—some from laziness; others preferring pleasure more than goodness.” (*Hippolytus*, 428 BC)

**Ovid:** “Oh wretched one (Infelix)! Drive out these flames that you feel from your maiden breast if you can. If I could, I should be more reasonable. But some strange power holds me back against my will. Desire counsels me one way; reason another. I see and approve the better course, but I follow the worse.” (*Metamorphoses*, 7 AD)

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<sup>129</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 93.

<sup>130</sup> Ben Witherington, *Paul’s letter to the Romans*, 195.

<sup>131</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 94.

<sup>132</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 656.

The most important fact about the similarities noted here is that they are expressions from unregenerate men. This is what we might expect if the persona is, like the Greek philosophers, a man pursuing morality and virtue in his own strength. Such is Paul's point later in Romans, namely "that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works" (9:31–32).

- Proponents of the Augustinian view often argue that only regenerate persons desire to do what is right and therefore this statement only makes sense if Paul is speaking as his regenerate self. Gerald Bray firmly argues, "Some people want to say that Paul is here describing the spiritual struggle of *unbelievers* before they come to Christ, as if such people are constantly frustrated by trying to do the right thing and failing. That interpretation is mistaken because it goes against the plain words of the text and contradicts our experience of spiritual life and death. A spiritually dead person does not suffer from any such inner conflict."<sup>133</sup> But this argument appears to ignore the testimony of unregenerate human experience, not least of which is catalogued among ancient Greek philosophers. There is a curious tendency to support the Augustinian view by appealing to Christian experience while at the same time neglecting to discern the experiences of unregenerate moralists and religionists. Depravity is not discrete. In other words, it is never on or off without degree. Just as regeneration does not render a Christian morally perfect in his present experience, so too no unregenerate person is as morally corrupt as they could be. We must not assume that unregenerate people are absolutely incapable of desiring what is morally right, even if that desire is tainted by a wrong ambition. There are many people who passionately advocate morals who are at the same time unregenerate. Regeneration is not a prerequisite to an interest in morals and virtue. *Frustration* with sin does not require regeneration, it is *freedom* from sin that does.

Some argue for the Augustinian view by emphasizing that this moral struggle is with reference to the law of God and not just morals in general. J. V. Fesko, for instance, writes, "given what Paul writes in Romans 1:18–32 and especially Romans 3:1–14 concerning the universal depravity of humanity, how can an unconverted person struggle with the desire to obey the law? Do they not all hate God (Rom. 3:18)? If there is no fear of God, and by extension His law, then how can an unbeliever struggle with the desire to obey it: 'For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice' (Rom. 7:19)?"<sup>134</sup> But this argument fails to appreciate the zeal of unregenerate Jews to pursue the law of God. Later Paul plainly says, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge"

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<sup>133</sup> Bray, *God Is Love*, 408.

<sup>134</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, 182.

(10:1-2). Paul bears witness that they are unregenerate and yet have a zeal even for God, yet not according to the gospel.

These arguments are quite relevant to the Augustinian argument that only the regenerate could delight in the law of God. Clearly this is not the case (2:17, 23; 3:2, 27-28; 9:31; 10:3-4; see also John 5:39).

In sum, the complaint voiced in 7:15 is the cry of an enslaved will. It wants what is right but is chained to what is wrong. The fact that the persona admits that his enslaved obedience to sin leaves him with a knowledge that the law is right and good (7:16) fittingly serves the purpose of the passage. It illustrates that the fault is not with the law but the one who wills to do it while being enslaved to sin. Regardless of how good the good is that he wants, his chains to sin keep him from doing it. Conversely, no matter how much he may hate the sin he does, yet he persists in it (7:15, 19). This is a picture of slavery to sin, not merely the testimony of a rightly sensitively conscience.

#### “IT IS NO LONGER I, BUT SIN” (7:17, 20)

Here, again, we encounter the evidence of enslavement to sin. Schreiner succinctly explains, “Paul is scarcely saying human beings are exculpated from guilt. What he underscores is the power of sin in taking captive the ‘I.’”<sup>135</sup>

Proponents of the Augustinian view must concede some degree of enslavement here, or else give room to evasiveness. For instance, the eloquent and often helpful Bishop Handley Moule writes, “A mysterious ‘other self’ is latent still, and asserts itself in awful reality when the true man, the man as regenerate, ceases to watch and to pray. And in this sense he dares to say ‘*it is no more I.*’ It is a sense the very opposite to the dream of self-excuse; for though the *Ego* as regenerate does not do the deed, it has, by its sleep, or by its confidence, betrayed the soul to the true doer.”<sup>136</sup> We should not have to suppose a mysterious “other self” living within the Christian. It might be compatible with philosophical musings seeking to explain personal feelings, but it surely is alien to the discourse and contradictory to Paul’s argument.

Alternatively, some run the risk of allowing the persona, by these words, to evade responsibility for his actions. This is the danger of anthropological dualism. One commentary plainly states, “He concludes that ultimately, as a Christian, it is not he who is responsible for doing wrong, but sin inside him (v. 17).”<sup>137</sup> This also appears to be what Bishop Anders Nygren, a strong defender of the Augustinian view, hints at when he writes, “Here is one of those places which show with special clarity that Paul is speaking of the Christian. As to the non-Christian he recognizes no such difference between the self and the indwelling sin.

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<sup>135</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 375.

<sup>136</sup> Handley Moule, *Romans*, 198.

<sup>137</sup> Bishopsgate, *Romans*, 137.

Significantly enough, he uses the word *ouketi*, 'no longer': 'It is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.' In the struggle between God's will, expressed in the law, and sin, the self stands on God's side."<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, he does not explain how the man who sins with good intentions (i.e. "siding with God") is distinguished from the man who sins without good intentions. Is he in some measure exonerated because he sides with God? Does not Paul's point have more to do with proving the law and the flesh to be impotent against the enslavement of sin? Should this statement be taken positively, as though illustrating a Christian, or negatively, as though illustrating one enslaved to sin? Is intention or impotency the point?

Douglas Moo helpfully expounds on the persona's "it is no longer I" statement, showing that by it he expresses enslavement to sin:

At first sight, Paul would appear to be saying something unlikely and, indeed, dangerous: that he is not responsible for his actions. But this is not what he means. His point is that his failure to put into action what he wills to do shows that there is something besides himself involved in the situation. If we had only to do with him, in the sense of that part of him which agrees with God's law and wills to do it, we would not be able to explain why he consistently does what he does not want to do. No, Paul reasons, there must be another 'actor' in the drama, another factor that interferes with his performance of what he wants to do. This other factor is indwelling sin. Sin is not a power that operates 'outside' the person, making him do its bidding; sin is something resident in the very being, 'dwelling' within the person, ruling over him or her like a master over a slave (v. 14b).<sup>139</sup>

Reymond paraphrases the persona's statement, "my evil deeds show that I am impotent against sin in my own strength, that is, I am not my own master [the 'it is not I that do it' phrase], but am rather a slave to indwelling sin which governs and controls me."<sup>140</sup> Barnett adds, "Because of the power of Adam's Sin living in him he experiences a fundamental dislocation between his mind (which approves of law) and his body (subject to Sin). Paul's life (his body) was and is like a defective motor car with 'a mind of its own' that will not go where he steered it or travel at the speed he decided or stop when he applied the brakes."<sup>141</sup> F. F. Bruce admits, "Here is the portrait of one who is conscious of the presence and power of indwelling sin in his life; indwelling sin is a tyrant whose dictates he hates and loathes, but against whose power he struggles in vain by his own strength."<sup>142</sup> Again, "those outside Christ—such as the Jew under the law, as Paul once was—cannot ultimately resist sin's power. Thus they are unable to do the good that God requires of them (cf. 3:9–18; 8:7–8)."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Anders Nygren, *Romans*, 300.

<sup>139</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 457–458.

<sup>140</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1131.

<sup>141</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 164.

<sup>142</sup> Bruce, *Romans*, 154.

<sup>143</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 458.



In contrast, Reymond rightly points out that “this is not true of the Christian for he is governed by the ‘indwelling Spirit’; if he is not so governed, he is not a Christian at all (8:9, 11)!.”<sup>144</sup>

The Augustinian view is hard pressed to offer a cogent explanation of this statement. But it makes perfect sense as a demonstration of enslavement to sin. It reinforces the reinforces the tyranny of sin reigning in the fleshly man bearing fruit for death.

### “KEEP ON DOING ... EVIL” (7:19)

Enslavement to sin evidences itself in practice. This is where the accent falls now.

The thing he hates, he now calls evil. Mark Seifrid observes, “Paul’s language becomes remarkably abstract in this passage in that he speaks of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, not merely of the law and sin. He thereby approximates, although never quite joins, ancient philosophical debate concerning the basis of moral inability.”<sup>145</sup> Schreiner insightfully adds, “The nefarious character of sin is illustrated in its ability to turn a good thing, the law, to an evil purpose. The law itself provides no power for obedience, and thus those who are in the flesh cannot do what it says, even if they long to do so. They are captives to the power of sin and are in misery under its dominion.”<sup>146</sup>

Accordingly, enslavement to sin is here expressed with increasing despair. He moves from describing his wanting and doing to the picture of chains that dictate his practice. He “practices” or “keeps on doing”<sup>147</sup> evil.

This exceeds any reasonable appeal to the biblical portrayal of a Christian’s struggle with sin. It flatly contradicts the biblical description of a Christian. As noted above, the discourse in this portion of Romans is abundantly clear on this point, repeatedly stating that in Christ the Christian is set free from enslavement to sin. Not sinless, but certainly not enslaved to keep on doing evil. Paul already prompted, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (6:16). We may here add the following verses to the significant list of verses in Romans noted above. First, we recall the words of Christ, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Note the approximation of “practices” with “slave to sin.” With piercing clarity, John writes, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Again, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil” (1 John

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<sup>144</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1128.

<sup>145</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*.

<sup>146</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 344.

<sup>147</sup> Present active indicative of πράσσω.

3:8). And finally, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).

While the Christian may stumble into sin (“For we all stumble in many ways,” James 3:2), he is characterized by self-control not enslavement to sin. Paul states plainly, “I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12); “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Corinthians 9:25); “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The fruit of the practice described by this statement fits Paul’s argument well. Also, it fully anticipates the desperate agony of the persona’s conclusion, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24). Again, the Augustinian view is severely challenged to coherently explain the practice of evil as comporting with biblical Christianity.

### “CAPTIVE TO THE LAW OF SIN” (7:23)

The persona’s progression brings increasing clarity to the argument. It is quite undeniable that he now explicitly states that he is a “captive” to sin, enslaved, chained, imprisoned, and incapable of breaking free. This simply cannot represent the Christian life.

- Proponents of the Augustinian view here appeal to the clause that immediately precedes this one, “I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind” (7:23). It is said that “only the Christian will experience this battle.”<sup>148</sup> Some argue, “none but a regenerate man would make such a struggle against sin.”<sup>149</sup> But the persona’s statement here does not emphasize his fighting against sin. Rather it emphasizes the frustration inherent in a powerless wanting (7:15). The enemy, Sin, has set up camp in his flesh. His mind wants to obey the Mosaic law, but is overpowered by sin, “making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (7:23). Barnett explains, “Paul is contrasting (1) his ‘innermost being’ (mind) with his ‘members’ (organs and limbs), and (2) the ‘law of God’ with the ‘law of Sin’.” Using vivid battle language he sees Sin as an aggressor laying siege to his ‘innermost being’ (which shelters the law of God) and taking him captive. Yes, his mind agrees with the law of God but Sin easily has his way; Paul is his prisoner. His ‘innermost being’ is at the whim of a body captured by a foreign invader.”<sup>150</sup> This is not the same as a Christian’s fighting against sin. Keener adds, “Like one enslaved by sin in 6:16–20, the mind here is defeated in battle (contrast 6:13; 13:12) and made a prisoner of war. Prisoners of war were normally enslaved if they were not ransomed. The anguished persona in this text cries out, ‘Wretched

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<sup>148</sup> Bishopsgate, *Romans*, 138.

<sup>149</sup> Stifler, *Romans*, 132.

<sup>150</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 164.

person that I am!’ needing deliverance from the ‘body of death’ (a body under the sentence of and destined for death, 7:24; 8:10).<sup>151</sup>

Moo explains the persona’s state of mind as portrayed here,

sin, working in and through the flesh, makes demands on and gains authority over *egō* [persona]; thus Paul calls it ‘the law of sin.’ Using military language, Paul describes this ‘law of sin’ as ‘waging war’ against ‘the law of my mind.’ ‘Mind’ refers to the reasoning side of a person. Paul makes clear that this ‘reason’ of people apart from Christ is perverted and darkened, preventing them from thinking correctly about God and the world. Here, however, Paul implies that the mind is an ally of God’s law; many therefore conclude that Paul must be describing a Christian, with a ‘renewed’ mind able to respond favorably to God’s will. But this does not follow. Granted that the mind of people apart from Christ is tragically and fatally flawed, it does not follow that the mind cannot understand and respond to God at all. All that Paul is saying is that the ‘reason’ or ‘will’ of the non-Christian is capable of approving the demands of God in his law. Especially if, as we have argued, Paul is speaking of his own experience under the law as typical of others, this capability cannot be denied (cf. 1:32; 2:14–15).<sup>152</sup>

Keener reminds us that “the inability to submit to God’s law in this passage is summarized as characteristic of the mental framework dominated by the flesh in 8:5. While the mind and inner person of 7:22–23 knows what is good, it is dominated by issues raised by the bodily members (7:23), hence is the mindset of the flesh (8:5).”<sup>153</sup> Because Paul again mentions “members” we are reminded of what he has already said concerning the relationship between our members and slavery, “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (6:13). Again, “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” (6:19). These statements directed to Christians stand in stark contrast to: “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (7:5); and, “I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (7:23). Reymond concludes, “The man says of himself that a ‘law [of sin]’ within him is ‘waging war against [ἀντιστρατευόμενον, *antistrateuomenon*] the law of his mind [that is, his desire to do good] and making him a prisoner [αἰχμαλωτίζοντά, *aichmalōtizonta*] of the law of sin at work within his members’ (7:23). Here again he stresses his slavery to sin

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<sup>151</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 94–95. He notes in his footnote, “Others also employed the image of waging war with the passions (Xenophon *Mem.* 1.2.24; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 8.20; Ps.-Diogenes *Ep.* 5, 12; cf. *m. ’Abot* 4:1; Schechter 1961: 272–73) and passions taking one as an enslaved prisoner (Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 36.4), including of war (Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 32.90; Iamblichus *Pyth. Life* 17.78).”

<sup>152</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 464–465.

<sup>153</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 94.

which is not true of the Christian (6:14), for the gospel has 'liberated [him] from the law of sin and death' (8:2)."<sup>154</sup>

In these several accounts, the persona declares himself a slave of sin. The Augustinian view cannot stand against the force of this one argument expressed in these various statements. Christians are set free from sin's slavery. So this view must engage in a barefaced contradiction to the discourse to maintain its position. In contrast, enslavement to sin despite ardency for the law corresponds perfectly to Paul's thesis (7:7-13), supporting and contributing to his argument by way of a powerful illustration.

## ENSLAVED TO THE LAW

The persona is enslaved not only to "the law of sin" (7:23) but also to "the law of God" (7:25). This is nothing less than startling. God and sin are quite opposite, so are their laws. Yet here their laws are coupled as masters of the same persona. Can any servant serve two masters (Luke 16:13)?

But there is significantly more here. This is a towering point. It is nearly a watershed issue. Misunderstanding this point in the soliloquy will send the mind down a meandering course that leads to a conclusion on the opposite side of the controversy. It embodies a most important principle and yet is quite probably the least appreciated factor in the whole debate.

- This very same statement is used to argue in favor of the Augustinian view. It is most often combined with, "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (7:22) as irrefutably positive proof that the persona is Paul the Christian. In part, this is what makes the statement so important to the controversy. If it can be used as support for opposite conclusions, then something is being presupposed about it.

Proponents of the Augustinian view see these statements, "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (7:22) and "I myself serve the law of God with my mind" (7:25), as undeniable evidence in favor of a regenerate persona. Anders Nygren writes, "It is only on the basis of the fact that the will is singly directed to the good that he can say that he 'delights in the law of God'."<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Stuart Olyott says, "The Christian is completely consistent in his heart of hearts. There is only one ruling principle in his affections and desires. It is that he wants to please God, and to keep his law. Yet he finds that his actions do not tally with his desires. He finds himself doing those things that are against the very nature of a Christian."<sup>156</sup> John Murray argues, "whatever its precise import, it must refer to that which is most determinative in his personality. In his inmost being, in that which is central in will and

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<sup>154</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1129.

<sup>155</sup> Anders Nygren, *Romans*, 291.

<sup>156</sup> Stuart Olyott, *Romans*, 93.

affection, he delights in the law of God. This cannot be said of the unregenerate man still under law and in the flesh. It would be totally contrary to Paul's own teaching. 'The mind of the flesh,' he says, 'is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be' (8:7)."<sup>157</sup> David Garland adds, "Unregenerate persons do not delight in the law of God and desire to do it (7:18, 22), since they neither seek God (3:11) nor fear God (3:18)."<sup>158</sup>

These arguments fail to acknowledge two basic assumptions.

## REGENERATION IS NOT NEEDED FOR DELIGHT IN THE LAW

First, it is not true that unregenerate persons do not delight in the law of God and desire to do it. It may sound right on the surface. But this argument fails to appreciate the zeal of unregenerate Jews to pursue the law of God.

Assuming that only regenerate persons could delight in the law of God neglects to acknowledge Paul's statements elsewhere in the letter and the import these statements have to his overall argument. He says of his unregenerate Jewish kinsmen, "you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law" (2:17-18). A couple of elements correspond to the passage at hand. First, by relying on<sup>159</sup> the law in conjunction with boasting<sup>160</sup> in God, Paul describes these unregenerate Jews as prizing the law as their way to God. This is confirmed in the words of Jesus to the unregenerate Pharisees opposing Him, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life" (John 5:39). Paul then describes their boasting as a boasting in the law itself that ironically leads to dishonoring God, "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law" (2:23). Such "relying" and "boasting" is similar in meaning to the "delighting" in 7:22. Second, the unregenerate Jews know God's will and "approve what is excellent" (2:18), but "dishonor God by breaking the law" (2:23). This corresponds to the persona saying, "I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out" (7:18). Moreover, the word rendered, "understand," in 7:15, suggests the meaning of "allow" (KJV) or "acknowledge, approve."<sup>161</sup> This is strengthened in 7:16, "I agree with the law." The persona is saying, "I do not *approve* my own actions, they run contrary to my desire, which *agrees* with the law." The word that Paul uses for delighting (συνήδομαι) in the law in 7:22, which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, also includes the idea

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<sup>157</sup> John Murray, *Romans*, 257

<sup>158</sup> Garland, *Romans*, 244–245.

<sup>159</sup> ἐπανάπαύομαι – "to find well-being or inner security, find rest, comfort, support" (BDAG).

<sup>160</sup> καυχάομαι – "to take pride in something" so as to "boast, glory, pride oneself, brag" in (BDAG).

<sup>161</sup> So BAGD; Hendricksen, Moo; etc. "By οὐ γινώσκω Paul can hardly mean 'I do not know'; for the subject of the verb knows only too well what he does. It is not much more likely that the meaning is 'I do not understand'; for the subject of the verb is depicted in vv. 15–24 as having a very clear comprehension of his position. The best explanation is along the lines of the sense 'acknowledge' (cf. the use of γινώσκειν of a father's acknowledging a child as his own)—so 'I do not acknowledge', that is, 'I do not approve', 'I do not condone'" (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 358–359).

of approving. While it conveys “having joy in connection with,” it also has the nuance of “happily approving” something.<sup>162</sup> It was used by the Greeks to convey congratulations.<sup>163</sup> The definition that William Mounce gives is, “to congratulate; to delight in, approve cordially.”<sup>164</sup> In the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (1990), Balz and Schneider suggest, “more likely, in view of σύμφημι in v. 16,” that the meaning of “delighting” in 7:22 is, “I joyfully agree with the law.”<sup>165</sup> Taken together, 7:22 is in perfect harmony with 2:17-18, where unregenerate Jews are in view.

With precision and clarity, Douglas Moo addresses the assumption that delighting in (joyfully agreeing with) the law requires regeneration:

One of the strongest arguments in favor of identifying the *egō* [persona] in this passage with the Christian is that only those regenerated by God’s Spirit can truly ‘delight in’ God’s law. There is weight to this argument; but it is not conclusive. Leaving aside the question of the propriety of calling OT saints (who certainly delighted in God’s law—cf., e.g., Pss. 19 and 119) regenerate Christians, we have abundant evidence that Jews in Paul’s day professed a delight in God’s law, and passages such as Rom. 10:2—‘for I bear witness that they [Israel] have a zeal for God’—show that Paul regarded that delight as genuine. Certainly these people did not fully understand, and did not fully obey, the law—but neither do Christians. This is not to deny that many Jews paid only lip-service to the law and could certainly not be said to ‘delight in the law of God according to the inner person.’ But Paul, reflecting his own experience, focuses in this passage on a ‘pious’ Jew—one who took his religion seriously and sought to do what was required of him. Taking as his example the ‘best’ in the non-Christian world, Paul reveals the utter helplessness of the person apart from Christ who has nothing but his ‘works’ on which to rely for salvation.<sup>166</sup>

It has also been suggested that law-keeping includes a dimension of boasting and delighting since, in the legalistic framework, the law is a privilege granted to provide opportunity to merit righteousness (3:2; 9:4). And this is precisely what Paul has and will argue against.

Professor Robert Reymond, speaking of Paul, reminds us that “it may legitimately be said that throughout his life as a self-righteous Pharisee he ‘delighted in the law of God with his mind’—observance of the law was his very reason for being. He was a ‘son of the law,’ was committed to it, and wanted to obey it. ... Paul also declared that the Jewish nation was ‘pursuing’ a righteousness of its own through law-keeping (Rom. 9:31–32). Apparently, then,

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<sup>162</sup> Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon* (2000).

<sup>163</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 607.

<sup>164</sup> William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1283.

<sup>165</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–), 306.

<sup>166</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 461.

unregenerate people can sincerely desire to be obedient to the law. Their problem, as the passage teaches, is their impotence to do what they want to do or know to be right.”<sup>167</sup>

- Some proponents of the Augustinian view have argued that we should not equate delighting in the law of God with establishing righteousness in a legalistic way. They argue that the legalist delights not in the law but in his own self-righteousness. But this rebuttal imposes a modern psychology on the issue and cannot be sustained in the light of the references already listed.

The argument of the discourse must be kept in mind. The emphasis in this passage is not on experiencing delight in God. Rather it is entirely focused on the frustration of one who wants to do right and cannot. The emphasis is, then, not so much on a delight in what is good as much as on the impotence to realize a good desire. Delight is precisely what the persona does not experience. In his *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (1899), Henry Liddon, Professor of Exegesis at Oxford University, writes, “But this harmonises with the fact that in unregenerate man the moral sense and reason are in sympathy with the law of God, while the sin-power predominates in the [flesh] so completely as to overbear the inner [self] and to destroy all ‘*liberum arbitrium in spiritualibus*’ [free will in spiritual things]. This may have been true even of the Jew in Rom. 2:17–24.”<sup>168</sup>

So while on the surface delighting in the law may give the impression that the persona is regenerate, deeper contextual consideration reveals that such a conclusion is built on an assumption alien to the argument. Being even extremely zealous for the law is no proof that a heart is right with God (9:31–32; 10:1–4; Galatians 1:13–14; Philippians 3:4–6).

#### NOT UNBELIEVERS IN GENERAL

Evaluating this assumption exposes another closely related assumption. Many argue that it is inconceivable that an unregenerate person would delight in God's law. They point to 1:18–32 to suggest that it is absurd to think that an unregenerate mind, that is at enmity to God (8:7), would delight in His law. The governing assumption in this argument is that the “unregenerate” is generic. This is not the case. The Lawyer view does not advocate for the persona representing a generic unregenerate person. The persona is Saul of Tarsus, “under the law”—a zealous, though unregenerate, Jew who was awakened to the futility of righteousness by law-keeping. The profile of the persona does not fit a Gentile, and therefore illustrates the condition of a very narrow class of people. But this rightly fits the argument that opens the chapter (7:1), namely the persona is one who was under the Old Covenant. Schreiner explains:

Such Jews have a genuine delight in God's law, even though they are unable to keep it. Elsewhere Paul refers to Jews who pursue the law for righteousness (9:31–32) and who

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<sup>167</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1129.

<sup>168</sup> Henry Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis*, 122.

have a zeal for God (10:2). Pursuit of the law and zeal are commendable and Paul does not criticize the Jews for these things. The fault of the Jews is that they did not observe the very law that they pursued and advocated with such zeal. Paul does not criticize the 'I' here for legalism but for inability to keep the law. Paul himself represents a Jew who attempted to live piously and was notable among his contemporaries for his zeal (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:4–6). Thus the portrait found in verses 14–25 is not true of all unbelievers; it depicts a person who delights in God's law but cannot keep it.<sup>169</sup>

So, the soliloquy is not illustrating the experience of all unregenerate people, nor is it referring only to those under the law who express themselves in these terms. Frederic Godet makes the point that "the whole is narrated about *himself*, but with the conviction that his experience will infallibly be that of every Israelite, and of every man who will seriously use the moral or Mosaic law as a means of sanctification."<sup>170</sup>

## NEW COVENANT SAINTS ARE NOT SLAVES OF OLD COVENANT LAW

Second, a Christian is not to be a slave to the Mosaic law. Here is the real substance of the ► problem with this assumption. Proponents of the Augustinian view treat delighting in and serving the law of God as a proof that the persona is a Christian when in fact it should serve as proof against the idea. As already noted, the whole context of this discourse is arguing *against*, not *for*, Christians turning to the law of God.

The New Covenant saint is "not under law" (6:14, 15). He "is free from that law," having "died to the law" (7:4). Indeed, "now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (7:6). The word, "serve" (δουλεύω), in 7:6 is the same word used in 7:25, "I myself *serve* the law of God with my mind." It means to serve as a slave, deriving for the noun for slave (δοῦλος). It describes an enslavement and corresponding obligatory performance. Assuming that it is a good thing that Christians serve as slaves of the Mosaic law is in contradiction to the discourse.

Joseph Fitzmyer writes, "Paul thus insists that the Christian is free from the law, and not just free from self, sin, and death."<sup>171</sup> Moo argues the same, "The *egō* [persona] in these verses struggles with the need to obey the Mosaic law; yet Paul has already proclaimed the release of the believer from the dictates of the law (6:14; 7:4–6)."<sup>172</sup> So also, Alfred Garvie, helpfully comments, "In this passage he assumes that the law is a legitimate authority for the man who approves but does not obey its commands; whereas for the Christian believer, who is not under law, but under grace, for whom Christ is the end of the law, the law is non-existent. If he were referring to the Christian experience in the passage he would be self-contradictory,

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<sup>169</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 388.

<sup>170</sup> Godet, *Romans*, 32.

<sup>171</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 473.

<sup>172</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 445.



for he would be admitting the validity of the law, which it is the purpose of his argument to deny.”<sup>173</sup>

The persona does not say that he delights in the promises of God. There is not a word on delighting in the gospel of God. Let us be clear on this point. A delight in Christ Himself through the gospel should mark every Christian. Christians do not go to Moses to become more like Jesus. New Covenant saints do not go back to the Old Covenant for sanctification. New Covenant saints are slave not of the law but “to righteousness leading to sanctification” (6:19), “of God” (6:22), and “of Christ Jesus” (1:1).

It is a contradiction to assume that a Christian is described as one enslaved to the Mosaic law with his mind (7:25). The Augustinian view cannot rightly survive this argument. Its efforts will only resorts in putting Christians back under the law, the very thing Paul is arguing against.

## POWERLESS

A central self-disclosure of the persona is that he is powerless—powerless to do what he wants (7:15), to do right (7:18), to overcome sin (7:20), to obey the law (7:22-23), and to escape the wrath of God (7:24). Nothing more clearly connects all else that is disclosed about the persona and his struggle than that he is a man without power. Not just a man that struggles, but a man incapable of overcoming. This too proves devastating to the Augustinian view.

### “NOTHING GOOD DWELLS IN ME” (7:18)

Powerlessness to fulfill the law and to overcome sin is the point of this statement. The beginning clause of 7:18 explains the ending clause of 7:17. The persona says, “sin ... dwells within me” (7:17), and then explains, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me” (7:18). Contrasting what “dwells” in him points to the source of his enslavement on the one hand and his inability on the other. It is about power. The rest of the sentence serves to further explain this by explicitly confessing, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (7:18).

- Proponents of the Augustinian view often argue that Paul qualifies this statement with, “that is, in my flesh” (7:18). Cranfield, for instance, argues that this “is a necessary qualification of ἐν ἐμοί [in me], since in the Christian the Holy Spirit dwells, who it is that works that willing what is good and acknowledging the rightness of the law.”<sup>174</sup> But this denies the very thing that chapter 8 celebrates. The Holy Spirit does not just enable the “willing” and the “acknowledging” but He empowers the very doing of good (8:2, 7-8, 13, 26; see also

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<sup>173</sup> Alfred Garvie, *Romans*, “Century Bible,” 174, cited by Griffith, *Romans*, 192.

<sup>174</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 360–361.

Philippians 2:12). To claim that this is a qualification given in order to leave room for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not grounded in the text or the argument of the text, nor does it make sense out of the powerlessness that is being highlighted. A better explanation is appreciated when the “that is” clause is taken appositionally, to describe the “me.” Käsemann suggests the following paraphrase, “nothing good dwells in me, I who am a person fallen and alienated from God.” He rightly describes the flesh as “the workshop of sin, the whole person in his fallenness to the world and alienation from God.”<sup>175</sup>

Against the Augustinian view is the bald statement of 8:9, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” The concentrated emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in 8:9-11 stands in contradistinction to the fleshly void of indwelling good in 7:18. And as Professor Reymond notes, “The man says of himself that ‘in me ... dwells no good thing’ (7:18), which is not true of the Christian for the Spirit of God dwells within him (8:9, 11).”<sup>176</sup>

Finally, it is noteworthy that Paul addresses the Corinthians concerning sinning with these words, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Corinthians 13:5). It is simply not fitting for a Christian to say “nothing good dwells me.” Again, Paul would say, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). And again, when addressing sin, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

### “NOT THE ABILITY TO CARRY IT OUT” (7:18)

Here is his clearest stated meaning, the persona has not the ability to carry out what is right. As Frederic Godet writes, Paul is “depicting the impotent struggles of a sincere and serious man, but one still under the yoke of the law, and ignorant of deliverance by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>177</sup> The emphasis in the original is on the inability to work out, bring about, accomplish, achieve, or produce something (κατεργάζομαι). It has the connotation of prevailing, subduing, or conquering. And the negation is stressed, which punctuates the point: “to prevail in good, I cannot!”

To speak explicitly of no ability, no resources, no conquering stands in complete contradistinction to chapter 8, which crescendos with, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (8:37).

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<sup>175</sup> Käsemann, *Romans*, 205.

<sup>176</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1128.

<sup>177</sup> Godet, *Romans*, 32.

The Augustinian view cannot satisfactorily reconcile this principle. To suggest a progression within the Christian life from chapter 7 to chapter 8 has already been dismissed on contextual, grammatical, and disputational grounds. A powerless man must, in the final analysis, be a Christless man. Keener suggests, “complete inability to do right and involuntarily compulsion to do wrong (7:15–20) sounds like possession rather than mere moral frustration!”<sup>178</sup>

Yet powerlessness corresponds directly with the thesis of the argument. What Paul says in 7:5 (“For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death”) is precisely what is being demonstrated in the passage. The persona is a man characterized by the flesh, with no good dwelling within him, but instead with sin dwelling in him, working in his members to overpower his best intentions. His powerlessness is owing to the culprit of his demise, sin dwelling in him.

## CONDEMNED

We finally come to the point that most directly corresponds to the argument of the passage. Here all loose ends come together and the thesis of the question that heads the passage is answered: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good” (7:13).

### “WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!” (7:24)

The persona calls himself “wretched” (ταλαίπωρος). This is no small matter. While the word can describe suffering and misery, “It is related to a term used several times in the Old Testament to refer to the lot of the wicked in God’s judgment.”<sup>179</sup> The verb almost always translates a Hebrew word for devastation associated with God’s judgment.<sup>180</sup> It is translated variously as “disaster” (Isaiah 47:11), “destruction” (Hosea 9:6; Amos 5:9), “ruined” (Micah 2:4), “destroyer” (Jeremiah 6:26), etc. In light of the next clause, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24), the meaning is without doubt in reference to condemnation.

- Yet, proponents of the Augustinian view argue that this statement reflects a virtuous disposition in the persona. Scriptural texts used to argue along these lines include 1 Corinthians 15:9 (“For I am the least of the apostles”), Ephesians 3:8 (“I am the very least of all the saints”), and 1 Timothy 1:15 (“I am the foremost [sinner]”). Alluding to these, William

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<sup>178</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 93.

<sup>179</sup> Gurtner, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, 220.

<sup>180</sup> “In the LXX, the verb *talaipōreō* almost always translates the Hebrew *šāḏaq*, almost always in the plural, referring to ravaged lands, devastated countries (Mic 2:4; Joel 1:10; Jer 4:20; Zech 11:2–3), ruined pillars (Hos 10:2)—the aftermath of violence.” (Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 366). “Gk. ταλαίπωρος, a strong term. It and its cognates are used several times in the LXX and the NT of the ‘misery’ or ‘distress’ that will come with the judgment of God (cf. Isa. 47:11; Jer. 6:7; 15:8; 20:8; 51:56; Amos 5:9; Mic. 2:4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:15; Jas. 5:1; Rev. 3:17[?]).” (Moo, *Romans*).

Hendriksen writes, “In line with the humble and self-incriminating language of eminent believers is the fact that Paul too, in referring to himself elsewhere, uses language not far removed from ‘Wretched man that I am!’”<sup>181</sup> But, “Wretched man that I am,” is far removed from Paul’s statements. These are not valid parallels. To humbly acknowledge one’s own sinfulness as a Christian is far from declaring one’s self to be under the just judgement of God. Moreover, such is entirely contrary to the argument of the discourse (5:1, 5, 6, 7-8, 9, 10, 11; 8:1).

A. W. Pink goes so far as to say, “This moan, ‘O wretched man that I am,’ expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life.”<sup>182</sup> There is a fine line between a Christian’s profitable reflection upon their need for grace daily and morbid introspection. To focus on your own corruptions and abject failures is to cross the line of profitability. To be sure, I think Christians in our generation are in serious need of self-examination, shame over their own sin that compels prompt and earnest repentance, a cultivation of the seriousness and hatred of sin, a brutally honest slaying of pride, etc. But I also know that these things are not the solution. We are always called to look away from our self and look to Christ. His beauty rather than our ugliness is a more important and final motivator for repentance and humility.

Instead, we should recognize the hopeless and desperate (unregenerate) character of this exclamation. In fact, it is characteristic of laments in Greek tragedies.<sup>183</sup> For example, Epictetus (125 AD) cried out, “Ah me, wretched man that I am!”<sup>184</sup> This fits as the cry of a frustrated moralist, not a Christian. Schreiner aptly comments, “Those who restrict the text to believers have the problem of explaining the bleakness of the alleged Christian experience portrayed in these verses.”<sup>185</sup>

Seifrid correctly notes, “His description of the ‘wretched person’ who knows condemnation by the law obviously corresponds to 7:5.”<sup>186</sup> And as Moo insightfully notes, “Certainly the Christian who is sensitive to his or her failure to meet God’s demands experiences a sense of

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<sup>181</sup> Hendriksen, *Romans*, 227.

<sup>182</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Arthur Pink Anthology* (2005).

<sup>183</sup> e.g., Aeschylus Ag. 1260; cf. Ovid Metam. 9.474; Apuleius Metam. 3.25 (Keener, *Romans*).

<sup>184</sup> *Encheridion* 26.

<sup>185</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 389 (so, e.g., Ridderbos 1975: 127; Wilckens 1980: 86; Moo 1991: 475; Seifrid 1992: 232, 236–37, 241).

<sup>186</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 116.

frustration and misery at that failure (cf. 8:23); but Paul's language here is stronger than would be appropriate for that sense of failure."<sup>187</sup>

BUT PAUL NEVER TALKED ABOUT HIS PAST LIKE THIS

- Some proponents of the Augustinian view argue that the tone and language of the persona in this passage is incompatible with what we know about Paul's pre-conversion mindset. So, "If the struggle in vv. 14–25 is Paul's pre-conversion experience, it would conflict with what he says elsewhere about his life as a Pharisee, especially in Phil. 3:6; Gal. 1:13ff. Whatever else Romans 7 might be saying, 'there is no hint that Paul, before his conversion, was the victim of such an inward conflict as he describes here [vv. 14–25]; on the contrary, all the evidence is against it. ... If Paul's conversion was preceded by a period of subconscious incubation, this has left no trace in our surviving records'."<sup>188</sup> F. F. Bruce adds, "When Paul himself lived under the law, before the Damascus-road event, he does not seem to have been aware of any such inward tension as is here described."<sup>189</sup>

But Paul writes of his past self in the persona with new knowledge. It is not that the persona expresses the very words that Paul said while unregenerate, rather Paul takes on the role of his previous life with new insight into what he then was. Moo explains,

Undoubtedly his perspective as a Christian enables him to see that conflict more clearly and more radically than he did at the time. This helps explain why Paul can be so pessimistic about Jewish failure to keep the law. Surely Paul knew that he, along with other Jews, succeeded in keeping many of the commandments and infringed only a small percentage of the whole. It is this knowledge, coupled with his pre-Christian, Jewish interpretation of 'righteousness,' that enables Paul to claim that he was 'blameless according to the righteousness of the law' (Phil. 3:6). But, as a Christian, Paul has a new perspective on God's law. He now sees it as a unity, an expression of God's will for his people that, when broken in any part, is broken in the whole. That which Paul 'willed' to do was keep the law; and it is just this, in the light shed on God and his law by Christ, that he failed as a Jew to do. ... [So,] we must recognize that, while this cry is uttered by a Jew under the law, it is written by a Jew who in Christ has discovered just how 'wretched' his past condition really was; and this Christian insight undoubtedly colors the narrative.<sup>190</sup>

### "WHO WILL DELIVER ME?" (7:24)

Here, again, we see that the persona projects defeat, not mere struggle. He cries for deliverance. This is desperation under condemnation, not Christian prayer. As Professor

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<sup>187</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 465.

<sup>188</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b.

<sup>189</sup> Bruce, *Romans*, 154.

<sup>190</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 456, 465–466. See also George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 552–553.

Reymond notes, Paul's conclusion is that "his unregenerate state had been a 'wretched' existence, so wretched, in fact, that he cried for deliverance from it!"<sup>191</sup>

Some argue that this is an earnest cry for Christian resurrection, that a future deliverance from our sinful bodies is spoken of here. But this is much more than a longing for resurrection or rescue from spiritual frustration. The language is soteriological. "The verb in 7:24, translated 'shall deliver' or 'rescue', is especially suited to describe a cry for salvation."<sup>192</sup> This is strengthened and confirmed in what immediately follows, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). The darkness of chapter 7 is here scattered by the light of the gospel. Add to this, the question effectively asks, "Who will set me free from death?" The answer follows, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (8:2).

Longenecker poignantly argues, "the logical argument that redemption by Christ is no redemption at all if this is a picture of the Christian life."<sup>193</sup> In other words, if the words of the persona in Romans 7:14-25 "can be asserted of the regenerate person, 'the regenerate man would thus be also the unregenerate'."<sup>194</sup>

Not only this, but what about the question itself? "We might also ask whether, if a Christian were speaking, the question would have been 'who will rescue me?' A Christian, longingly anticipating his or her final deliverance from the sins and woes of this life, would not have been expected to ask about the identity of the deliverer."<sup>195</sup>

These cannot be the words of a Christian.

### "BODY OF DEATH" (7:24)

Death was sounded in the thesis, "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?" (7:13). Thus, the illustration has come to completion with the words, "body of death." In other words, "In this anguished exclamation, the law has fulfilled its divine purpose. The divine contention which was brought to an end in the cross has been brought to an end in the human heart (cf. 3:5-8, 21-26)."<sup>196</sup>

In short, "His only point throughout is that Sin ruled in his fallen flesh and that law only made things worse."<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, "Paul has been showing how *egō* [persona], through, and despite, the law, has been brought into condemnation because of the reigning power of sin.

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<sup>191</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic*, 1132.

<sup>192</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b.

<sup>193</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 652-653.

<sup>194</sup> Baur, in the *theol. Jahrb* (1857), 192, cited by Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*.

<sup>195</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 446.

<sup>196</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 118.

<sup>197</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 165.

Here, in the personal plea that brings to a climax the narrative of vv. 7–23, the condition from which deliverance is sought can be nothing but the condition Paul has depicted in these verses: the status of the person under sentence of spiritual death, condemned, bound for hell.”<sup>198</sup>

But deliverance from the body of death is directly answered in 8:10-13, as not by the law but by the Spirit. The contrast between chapter 7 and 8 is unmistakable and its function in the discourse should be appreciated. Death marks the end of the discussion, and appropriately so. Since its purpose is not to describe a normal Christian experience, but the plight of a religionist seeking to please God in his own strength. The dramatic conclusion of the soliloquy is not incidental. Death is a subject vastly relevant to the gospel. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). But the solution to the problem dramatized in the soliloquy is more than answered in the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To bring the persona section to a close, I offer a table summarizing the contrast of the persona with what Paul teaches concerning a Christian.

<b>The Christian</b>	<b>The “Wretched Man”</b>
Justified (5:1, 9; 8:1, 30, 34)	Condemned (7:9, 13, 24)
Freed from the law (6:14, 15; 7:4, 6; 8:2-3)	A slave to the law (7:16, 21, 22, 25)
Freed from sin (6:18, 20, 22; 8:2)	A slave to sin (7:14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23)
Gripped by life (5:21; 6:4, 13, 23; 8:2)	Gripped by death (7:10, 11, 13, 24)
Of the Spirit (7:6; 8:4-6, 9, 10, 11, 14)	Of the flesh (7:5, 14, 18, 25)
Empowered (8:3-4, 12-13, 26)	Powerless (7:15-23)
Dead to sin (6:11-14)	Alive to sin (7:9, 11, 13, 17, 20)
Spirit indwelt (8:9, 11)	Sin indwelt (7:17, 20)
Cry <i>of</i> deliverance (5:1; 8:1)	Cry <i>for</i> deliverance (7:24)

The Augustinian view is incapable of consistently reconciling the details of the persona with that of a Christian as taught in the surrounding context. The cumulative weight of the persona’s self-disclosure in this soliloquy is overwhelming. Yet these statements are not

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<sup>198</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 466.

simply to be tallied. They are intended to help explain 7:13. This they do persuasively. They serve an integral purpose in the discourse, showing (a) the deprecation of the Mosaic law and (b) sin exploiting the law through fallen flesh leading to death.



## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, the data overwhelmingly discloses the “wretched man” of Romans 7 to be Saul of Tarsus, a man who was zealous for the law and the traditions of the Pharisees, hotly pursuing a righteousness of his own that comes from the law. So zealous was he that with burning passion he persecuted the church of Christ until Christ confronted him and opened his eyes to behold both the glory of Christ and the wretchedness of his own soul (Acts 9:1-16). It is no less than this esteemed Pharisee, “educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law” (Acts 22:3) who “was advancing in Judaism beyond many of [his] own age among [his] people” (Galatians 1:14), who turned Christian. Now, as Paul, he is unashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16) of Christ crucified, which proves to be “a stumbling block to Jews” (1 Corinthians 1:23). His unregenerate Jewish kinsmen who are “zealous for the law” construe Paul to “teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses” (Acts 21:20-21). Indeed, this was the charge laid against him before his people, “This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place” (Acts 21:28). But this charge is merely the estimate of the spiritually blind. As Paul writes, “their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:14). He then concludes,

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:15-18).

Likewise, Paul writes Romans 7 and 8. In 7:14-25 he dramatizes his former blindness and in chapter 8 he engages his fellow Christians to extol the freedom of the Lord in the Spirit. Massive spiritual undercurrents pervade the blindness of enslavement to the law. For none can fulfill it, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But these realities Saul did not see until he became Paul. Formerly he thought himself blameless, but now he sees that he was wretched. This indeed is the nature of spiritual blindness.

Fittingly, then, this passage serves as a powerful personal dramatization of a former futility. An example that illustrates a paradigm to be avoided. It sounds a clarion, as though to say, “Stay away! Stay away! The law, though righteous, cannot make you righteous. It belongs to the Old Covenant, but we belong to the New Covenant. The promised Christ has come! And all who trust in Him are given the promised Holy Spirit! We are justified in Christ and sanctified by the Spirit.”

This description, indeed, captures all the key elements of the immediate discourse. It brings together, with force, arguments that support Paul’s thesis. Only in this view are the problems that Paul raises resolved. Only in this view is Paul’s argument supported consistently. Only

this view coherently accounts for and makes the most sense of all the contextual, grammatical, and disputational data. Only this view makes much of Christ, not the law nor our strength nor our struggle with sin, for God's glory and our joy.

*May this analysis serve only to promote Christ, for God's glory and man's joy.*

*“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?”*

**2 Corinthians 3:5–8**

# APPENDIX

## SUMMARY

The answer that makes best sense of this passage is that Paul under Law was the ‘wretched man’. Thus Paul is clinching the case he began to make back in 5:12. Pure and simple his point is, that he and all people sinned in Adam and have died in Adam, including Jews like himself. Law does nothing to mitigate Sin or rescue its adherents from Death. But Paul is teaching this so that people understand that the age of grace has come, expressed in the death of Christ and empowered by the inner presence of the Spirit.<sup>199</sup>

I have sought to acknowledge and address the challenges surrounding the interpretation of Romans 7:13-25. I have proposed that conclusions should not be drawn from a mere tally of competing observations but rather through the process of discourse analysis.

The context of Romans 7:13-25 presents the Mosaic law as the hinge on which the interpretation must turn. The Mosaic law is holy but helpless. It is righteous but cannot remove unrighteousness or impart righteousness in sinners. The Mosaic law, then, neither justifies nor sanctifies. Moreover, the Christian is a New Covenant saint, redeemed by the blood of the promised Christ and indwelt by the promised Holy Spirit. The New Covenant saint is not sanctified through the Old Covenant law. The Christian does not come under the law, going back to Moses in order to become more like Christ. The Christian is not to be enslaved in his mind to the law.

Romans 7 is situated in the middle segment of a larger discourse, primarily concerned with showing Christians that they are under grace, not law. The argument in the immediate context is concerned with presenting the problem of living with one’s mind set on the flesh and the law. The passage serves as an illustration of the problem. Living in the flesh under the law is death. The solution is presented in chapter 8 where the Christian is said to have died to the law with his mind set on the Spirit, not the flesh. Life in Christ through the Spirit is life, which contrasts the theme of death so prevalent in chapter 7. Romans 7:14-25 is part of an argument, constituting a problem anticipating a solution. The solution is realized only in chapter 8.

The grammar of the discourse furnishes compelling evidence that the passage depicts Paul under the law, dramatizing what his predicament was before Christ. It is told retrospectively and therefore from a gospel-enlightened insight.

The persona is carnal, enslaved to sin, enslaved to the Mosaic law, powerless, and condemned. The language used by the persona is categorically the language of the

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<sup>199</sup> Barnett, *Romans*, 165.

unredeemed. Everything in the passage is devoid of Christ, the Holy Spirit, hope, and security. Yet all these glorious realities flood chapter 8, presenting the grand solution.

In the final analysis, the conflict described in Romans 7:14-25 demonstrates the frustration and futility of striving in one's own strength with the best intentions against the law of sin and death. It warns against striving for righteousness under the Mosaic law. It proves that the only hope anyone has against sin's condemnation is found in Christ crucified applied and maintained in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a soliloquy designed to repel Christians from attempting its ways and compel them to appreciate with greater depth the grace of God in Christ Jesus given to us in the gospel. It is designed to make much of Christ, not the law nor our strength nor our struggle with sin, for God's glory and our joy.

## APPLICATION

What follows is a series of considerations for application. These are principle-based points of application taken from the passage. It is important that we understand how to profit from a text like this, not only in our apprehension but even more in our affection. Texts like this may be a bit more challenging to apply to New Covenant saints, but every passage in sacred Scripture can serve to edify us and ultimately to glorify God in us.

Griffith explains the argument of the passage and how it may be related by way of certain and limited application to Christians:

The one point of the passage is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin. This is the experience of any man who tries the experiment, whether he be regenerate or unregenerate. The experiences here described are certainly not those of the Christian life as it ought to be, and as it may be, the normal Christianity, that is, of ch. 6:17, 18; 7:4, 6; 8:1, 2; 1 Peter 1:8, 9. And yet they may be true of many professed Christians as they now are. One proof beyond all others that the passage cannot refer to the normal Christian life is the teaching about the Christian in relation to law.<sup>200</sup>

In like manner, Douglas Moo encourages Christians to consider how they might draw from this passage principles to apply to their Christian lives:

The fact that Paul is describing the experience of the Jew under the Mosaic law does not mean, of course, that the conflict described here is peculiar to the Jew. All non-Christians are in a similar situation, and many—probably most—Christians can find in this description of nagging failure to do what is good an all-too-accurate reflection of their own experience. But, without denying the similarity, I must say again that the conflict Paul describes here is indicative of a slavery to the power of sin as a way of life (v. 14b) that is *not* typical, nor even possible, for the Christian.<sup>201</sup>

In the subsections that follow, I attempt to offer several points of application appropriate for New Covenant saints.

### LET US NOT SERVE THE MOSAIC LAW

First, Paul has been arguing against Christians turning to the Mosaic law for righteousness, positionally or practically. This is an immediate purpose and lesson in the passage. Serving the Mosaic law is not the prescribed path for Christians to live by. Instead, we are to live in the Spirit.

Keener notes, “Ideally, Paul’s depiction cannot refer to a believer, least of all to one who embraces Paul’s theology of new life in Christ. That is not to claim that no believer would

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<sup>200</sup> Griffith, *Romans*, 191-192.

<sup>201</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 456.

ever share any elements of the description, but any believer who did so would be thinking in a manner incompatible with Paul's teaching on the law."<sup>202</sup>

## LET US GUARD FROM LEGALISM

Christians have been warned that the law will neither justify nor sanctify. We are reminded that we do not become holy and please God by obeying the law. Christians who take on this mindset tend to judge themselves and others outwardly. Christians who judge themselves and others by their performance often experience severe emotional and spiritual confusion. This can be very harmful to a Christian's walk.

Christians who try to attain righteousness through obedience to law often grow cold inside and obey to prove something. This trajectory tends to promote hypocrisy. Otherwise, those who use the law for righteousness sometimes suffer collapse and abandon their striving altogether.

Also, legalists are extremely hard on other people. They are characteristically critical, unloving, and unforgiving.

## LET US EXAMINE OURSELVES

One obvious take away from this passage is to examine ourselves. If our lives are characterized by enslavement to sin, then we have cause to be deeply concerned. Paul writes, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Self-examination is not intended to erode assurance or distract from the glorious power of God to keep His own. Along these lines, Peter exhorts Christians, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall." (2 Peter 1:10). Such an exercise is entirely purposed for purification. We would do well to remember the words of John, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:1–3).

## LET US DISCIPLINE OUR MINDS

One take away from this passage is that we as Christians must put to death any inclination to legalism. But this passage more particularly teaches us that we must understand and live

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<sup>202</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 93.

in the right dominion, under the right authority and power. This is a function of faith as realized in the discipline of the mind.

The stress of chapter 8 emphasizes this application: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (8:5–6). In contrast to setting our mind on the law for righteousness, let us instead take this counsel: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1–3).

#### LET US REMEMBER THAT WE WILL STILL STRUGGLE WITH SIN

Let us remember that all regenerate, justified, forgiven saints continue to struggle with sin. Sin remains a reality to the very end of our lives in this world. Let us “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). And, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13). Let us also, “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Let us, “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability” (2 Peter 3:17). May we, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2), remembering that “we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). So let us, “be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election” (2 Peter 1:10). Lastly, let us be sure as modeled by Paul, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). See also the section above entitled, “Saints Struggle with Sin.”

#### LET US REMEMBER THAT THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IS SOMETIMES SIMILAR

Many expositions of this passage present what is most likely an example of right theology preached from the wrong text. At least when it comes to expositions that proclaim the truths of Galatians 5, showing that true Christians may experience frustration and struggle with sin but have the Spirit within to overcome.

Let us remember that the Christian experience is sometimes similar to certain features experienced by the persona in Romans 7:14-25. We too can sometimes do what we do not want to do. We too can do the very things that we hate. We too, at times, can succumb to sinful passions (James 4:1). This is why we are exhorted, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14); and “I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Christians experience regret, shame, and remorse. We can even cry out

to God for help. But we are not to confuse these similar experiences with the hard reality behind the persona—enslavement to sin without Holy Spirit. Instead we must remember, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Let us also remember that it is the Lord who preserves us, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24); and, “the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Let us remember, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14–16).

#### LET US REMEMBER THAT WE ARE NOT SLAVES TO SIN

Romans 6:11 exhorts us, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” This too requires the discipline of our minds. We must make it a habit of our hearts to rehearse our identity in Christ to ourselves. We must cultivate our minds to instinctively think within the sphere of being in Christ and for Christ. We must strengthen the patterns of our thought-life away from sin and preach to ourselves that in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin.

#### LET US REMEMBER THAT WE CANNOT SANCTIFY OURSELVES

We cannot please God in our own strength. We must yield to the Holy Spirit, looking to Christ. Christ reminds us, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

#### LET US REMEMBER THAT IN CHRIST WE ARE NOT WHO WE WERE

John Newton incisively remarked, “I am not the man I want to be. I am not the man I ought to be. But, in Christ, I am not the man I was.” Let us apply this to ourselves as we reflect upon Romans 7. Rightly understanding this passage should not rob us of comfort. Since our sanctifying strength is not found in looking to examples of weakness or failure. Co-misery is not a proper and healthy source of comfort. True comfort, strength, and motivation in sanctification comes in knowing the love of God for us in our worst condition. It is found in knowing that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).



## LET US REMEMBER OUR PAST TO PROMOTE OUR FUTURE IN CHRIST

We can observe in Paul's example that rehearsing our past can promote our resolve to live in the present in and for Christ: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:8–13).

## CAN WE USE ROMANS 7:14-25 TO COUNSEL CHRISTIANS?

So, should we use this passage to counsel Christians? The short answer is, yes, in the way that is demonstrated here. There are legitimate points of application. Paul wrote this to Christians. But notice that proper application does not require compromising the authorial intent of the text itself. Instead, we must remind the Christian that Paul is arguing an important point about our life in Christ by way of contrast to living a religious life apart from Christ. In the end, this is the most important lesson that we can take away and apply.

# THE LAWYER VIEW

The biblical word “lawyer” (*nomikos*) simply describes that which pertains to the Mosaic law. By using “lawyer” to describe the view advocated in this discourse analysis, I am suggesting a word that best captures the essential character of the persona in the soliloquy.<sup>203</sup>

The persona is Saul of Tarsus or the apostle Paul before becoming a Christian, while he was still “under the law.” The character he presents is one that pertains to Mosaic law, upholding it as holy and good, yet helpless. The lesson includes the idea that apart from God, the lawyer is incapable of pleasing God. In this way, the lesson does not focus on regenerate or unregenerate status. Rather, it focuses on the holiness of the law, the sinfulness of sin, and the impotency of the flesh. These are relevant reminders to rightly direct Christians away from the Mosaic law and to the Holy Spirit for their life and walk in Christ.

The Lawyer view maintains the following two clarifications.

## ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

The struggle portrayed in Romans 7:14-25 is acted out retrospectively. While the voice is that of Saul of Tarsus, the insight is that of the apostle Paul. As Paul relives his past religious life apart from Christ, and with a renewed perspective of God’s righteousness (see 1:16), both his insight and expressions are heightened.<sup>204</sup>

## NOT ALL UNREGENERATE PEOPLE

The struggle of the persona represents a Jew who attempts to secure life through the Mosaic law while in the flesh. He is also ignorant of Christ, does not see himself in the New Covenant, and is devoid of the Holy Spirit. His struggle, therefore, does not illustrate the experience of all unregenerate people, nor does it refer only to those under the law who are under conviction of sin.

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<sup>203</sup> Legalist would be similar but not the same. Since the emphasis in this passage is not on legalism *per se* but rather on vindicating the law and exposing the sinfulness of sin while highlighting the impotency of the flesh, it seems more appropriate to think in terms of a Lawyer view than a Legalist view.

<sup>204</sup> “But such a plight is only evident when viewed retrospectively through the lens of faith. The purpose of the law was to mark out sin as sin; but law has no power to effect either redemption or transformation. In that sense Torah points to salvation but does not provide it (cf. Rom. 3:21–22).” (Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God*, 147–148). “Throughout this chapter a Christian interpretation of a pre-Christian set of conditions is in view.” (Witherington, *Paul’s letter to the Romans*, 195).

## OBJECTIONS

The most significant objections to the Lawyer view that have not been addressed above are considered here.

### PRESENT TENSE

Probably the most important objection raised in favor of the Augustinian view is that Paul switches from the aorist tense in 7:7-12 to the present tense in 7:13-25. This objection is important for at least two reasons. First, it is based on a grammatical observation in the immediate discourse. Second, shifting from aorist to present tenses throughout a pericope reasonably suggests moving from describing something past to something present.

J. I. Packer argues that “Paul’s shift from the past tense to the present in verse 14 has no natural explanation save that he now moves on from talking about his experience with God’s law in his pre-Christian days to talking about his experience as it was at the time of writing.”<sup>205</sup> David Garland says, “Paul leaves the Edenic echoes that surface in 7:7–11 and switches to the present tense in verses 14–25 to link ‘the narrative to the present which Paul shares with his readers’.”<sup>206</sup> F. F. Bruce adds, “There, he described what happened to him when he lived in ‘this present age’; here, the ‘age to come’ has already arrived, although the old age has not yet passed away, and he is caught up in the tension between the two.”<sup>207</sup> Finally, Christopher Ash suggests, “Paul shifts from his story in the past (vv. 7–13) into his present tense story of Christian experience. Just as his past tense (unconverted) story is the story of every human being, so his present tense (converted) story is the story of every Christian.”<sup>208</sup>

However, a shift in tense can hardly bear the weight of shifting from the non-Christian to the Christian Paul. Surely the tense alone cannot, apart from other grammatical guides, justify such a significant interpretive decision. Keener observes, “Whereas most commentators recognize that 7:8–13, which uses past tense verbs, does not refer to Paul’s present state, they are somewhat more divided in their assessment of 7:14–25. Nevertheless, most do recognize that Paul speaks in a voice other than his own present person here; the contrasts with the larger context are simply too great to fit the Christian life as he describes it, even had Paul thought himself an unusually weak Christian.”<sup>209</sup> Schreiner points out that “the use of the present tense is hardly a decisive argument for the theory that Christian experience is

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<sup>205</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 118.

<sup>206</sup> Garland, *Romans*, 244.

<sup>207</sup> Bruce, *Romans*, 153.

<sup>208</sup> Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 259–260.

<sup>209</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 91–92.

contemplated. Present tense verbs do not necessarily indicate ‘present’ time. Indeed, recent research questions whether the present tense has any significant relationship to time.”<sup>210</sup>

D. A. Carson warns that there are several interpretive fallacies connected with Greek tenses. In his excellent work, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Carson writes, “The majority of contemporary students of Greek grammar argue that Greek tenses are time-related in the indicative ... I am not persuaded this is right. A rising number of Greek grammarians argue that the fundamental semantic force of the Greek tense is ‘aspect’: it reflects the author’s choice of how to present an action. The time of the action is not conveyed by the Greek tense.”<sup>211</sup>

So why would Paul shift from the aorist to the “present” tense here? Robert Gundry suggests that “the use of the present tense to describe vividly the experience of one’s past is not unprecedented in Paul.”<sup>212</sup> Though in miniature, the same kind of tense shift occurs for a persona in 3:7, “But if through my lie God’s truth abounds [aorist] to his glory, why am I still being condemned [present] as a sinner?” (3:7).

There are other places where Paul assumes a role and engages in a present tense first person singular soliloquy. Some examples include 1 Corinthians 6:15, 13:1–3, Galatians 2:18, and Philippians 3:4–6. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, Longenecker points out, “The inadequacy of all without love, as portrayed in these verses, is meant neither as a strictly personal experience nor as a strictly personal realization. It is gnomic, aphoristic, meant to be taken as a general truth—though certainly Paul would insist that such a general truth has also been experienced and realized in his own life.”<sup>213</sup> Something similar may indeed be at work in our passage. No one assumes in these and other examples that Paul is describing a situation contemporaneous to his writing.

A shift in the tense most reasonably signals a shift in the discourse. Fitzmyer argues, “Whereas vv 7–13 were a confession, in which the Ego recognized its deception by sin, which made use of the law, now vv 14–25 become an apology for the law itself. For this reason it is expressed in the present tense.”<sup>214</sup> Longenecker says that “the difference between 7:7–13 in its use of past tenses and 7:14–25 in its use of present tenses should have alerted all previous commentators to the differing purposes and functions of these two passages.”<sup>215</sup> Seifrid argues that the shift at 7:13 occurs for rhetorical reasons and that the “decisive” present picks up in the discourse in chapter 8, “The change in tense usage between the two parts has to do with Paul’s shifting of his focus from the encounter with the law, to the fallen person

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<sup>210</sup> S. Porter 1989; S. Porter 1994: 20–49. Schreiner, *Romans*, 386.

<sup>211</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 67.

<sup>212</sup> Storms, *Biblical Studies*, Ro 7:25b.

<sup>213</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 655.

<sup>214</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 473.

<sup>215</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 659.

who knows the law. He does not speak of a specifically Christian struggle in verses 14–25. The decisive ‘present’ of God’s work in Christ appears only at the beginning of Romans 8.”<sup>216</sup>

Reymond argues, “Nor must the present tenses in 7:14–25 necessarily indicate Paul’s experience at the time he is writing Romans as the mature Christian apostle and missionary. The ‘historical [or ‘dramatic’] present’ is a well-known use of the present tense in Greek when the writer wished to make a past event or experience more vivid to his reader.”<sup>217</sup> The esteemed Greek New Testament grammar by Dana and Mantey (1955), states, “The present tense is thus employed when a past event is viewed with the vividness of a present occurrence.” They go on to account for its use, calling it “a residue from the primitive syntax of the Indo-European language, when, like the Semitic verb, time relations were indicated by the context rather than the inflectional forms.”<sup>218</sup> Even though this has been countered with the claim that the historical present is a feature of narratives and not epistolary texts, the present still functions as a “dramatic present” in soliloquies. Kruse explains, “Unlike the previous passage (7:7–13), which employs the aorist tense of the verb almost exclusively, 7:14–25 is marked by the complete absence of the aorist and uses the present tense extensively (36 times), a tense that more vividly expresses the dire situation of the ‘I’ than does the aorist tense. It is a situation in which the ‘I’ struggles with an inner conflict between what it wills on the one hand and what it does on the other. Whereas the rhetorical ‘I’ was used in 7:1–13 to depict Israel’s historical encounter with the law, in 7:14–21 it is used to depict vividly the ongoing struggle of the Jewish person still living under the law.”<sup>219</sup> In other words, “The state of the person who is a slave to sin is communicated most effectively through present tense verbs.”<sup>220</sup>

The aorist captures the snapshot of the whole. The present dramatized the details. The shift in tense, then, brings not Paul into the present but the reader into the past.

This most important of objections has a grammatically sound answer. Besides, it is quite odd that virtually all, if not all, of the earliest Greek commentators for the first several hundred years understood Paul as writing of his unregenerate self under the law, before coming to Christ. What is striking in this thought is that they were native to the Greek language and rhetoric. Also, they were closer to the time of the writing and therefore closer to the style and use of such language. If a shift into the present tense demanded a corresponding shift into Paul’s present condition, then surely these Greek readers would have at least commented on it. Their silence on the matter speaks, silencing this objection.

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<sup>216</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 116.

<sup>217</sup> Reymond, *NSTCF*, 1128.

<sup>218</sup> Tommie Dana and Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (1955), 185.

<sup>219</sup> Kruse, *Romans*, 305.

<sup>220</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 387.

## GALATIANS 5:17

Another frequently cited objection is the supposed parallel between Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:17, which reads, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

Several distinctions should be observed.

(1) The Galatians text argues for a conflict between the flesh and the Holy Spirit, Romans is between a person’s willing and doing without reference to the Holy Spirit. To assume the presence of the Holy Spirit in this struggle is to import what Paul deliberately reserves for chapter 8 when he reveals the solution. A first-time read of the Romans passage does not afford the same mindset as the Galatians passage. The discourses are not parallel.<sup>221</sup>

(2) The Galatians text twice excludes the law from the struggle equation (Galatians 5:18, 23). In both instances it is because the Holy Spirit has given life apart from the law. The man in Romans 7 is seeking to “do” the law as a slave to the law. Yet, again, Galatians urges the Christian to yield to the Holy Spirit that He would bear His fruit in and through them, concluding with the remark, “against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:23). Galatians argues against the Christian submitting to and serving the law, whereas the persona in Romans 7 sets as his goal service as a slave to the law (7:25). This contradicts the theme of Galatians. Paul chastises Christians “who desire to be under the law” (Galatians 4:21). The contextual argument of Galatians is in perfect harmony with that of Romans 7, arguing against the Christian turning to the Mosaic law for sanctification. This is precisely how Galatians 5 opens, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law” (Galatians 5:1–3). He then sternly warns them, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). In summary, Paul declares, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Galatians 5:18).

(3) The Galatians text explicitly states, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). In contrast, the Romans 7 man is “of the flesh, sold under sin” (7:14) and “captive to the law of sin that dwells in [his] members” (7:23).

(4) The Galatians text speaks of opposing desires between the Holy Spirit and the flesh, not captivity, slavery, or a body of death needing deliverance. In fact, the context of the Galatians

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<sup>221</sup> Herman Ridderbos argues, “The elements placed over against each other in Romans 7 are ... not (as in Gal. 5) the Spirit and the flesh, or (as in Rom. 6) grace and the law, but the human ego, the ‘I-myself’ (v.25!) and the flesh, the law of God and the law of sin” (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 127).

text begins with an exhortation to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and reminds the Christian that they are not of the flesh and therefore should have no participation in the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Instead, the Christian is to live “in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). Galatians 5:17 belongs to the world of Romans 8, not Romans 7. In fact, Galatians 5:17 finds closer parallel to Romans 8:6, “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

So the apparent similarities with Galatians 5:17 prove to be superficial. This affirms the truth that Christians will continue to struggle with sin but does not confuse struggling with slavery. Though the true Christian will continue to struggle and fight against sin, he is not a slave to it nor the Mosaic law.

## THE UNREGENERATE MIND OF ROMANS 8

Some have argued that the persona in Romans 7 cannot be unregenerate because the unregenerate mind in Romans 8 is incompatible with the mind of the persona. For instance, the persona says, “I myself serve the law of God with my mind” (7:25). But in chapter 8, Paul writes, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (8:7). It is then suggested that Paul consistently argues that the unregenerate mind is opposed to God and His will, and by implication His word (cf. Romans 1:28; Ephesians 4:17; Colossians 2:18; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 3:8). So, the objection goes, how can the persona of Romans 7 desire to do good and hate evil, and delight in the law of God and seek to serve the law of God with his mind?

In answer to this objection, I first appeal to the section above on the persona. Specifically, the point that the persona is not a pagan but a thoroughly devoted Jew who has been well educated in the law of God and the traditions of Judaism. So texts like, “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (1:28), do not correspond to the mind of the persona. Instead, of the persona we could say something like, “God gave them up to a self-righteous mind.” This too would apply to Ephesians 4:17 (“you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds”) and 2 Timothy 3:8 (“these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind”). But even here we must be careful. Even unregenerate Gentile minds may desire good in some measure. The moralists and devoted religionists of the unregenerate world plainly testify to this. Paul himself acknowledges that Gentiles, “who do not have the law,” are capable of exercising some measure of virtue, who “by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (2:14–15).

As for those described in Colossians 2:18 (“insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous [fleshly] mind”)

and 1 Timothy 6:5 (“depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain”), it is clear that these types of examples do legitimately compare. They describe religious, though depraved, minds. This category of unregenerate minds fits with the persona of Romans 7, a “fleshly mind” that is religious (“insisting on asceticism,” etc.) with self-centered ambitions (“imagining that godliness is a means of gain”). This too is the mind of those described in Romans 10:2-3, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” These examples in no way contradict what Paul says in Romans 8. The religious mind most certainly can be set on the flesh and thereby pose an affront to God. The mind should not be oversimplified in our analysis. It may have a righteous aim with an unrighteous ambition. It may also have a righteous action with an unrighteous aim or ambition. So while an unregenerate mind may be very religious with an otherwise good aim, yet it is hostile to God in its ambition. The words of the prophet Isaiah come to mind, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6); and “this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13).

So let us consider again Paul’s words in Romans 8, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (8:7). This is undoubtedly a statement made in reference to the impotence of the persona in Romans 7. This is suggested by the fact that explicit reference is made to submitting to “God’s law” and is coupled with an emphasis on his utter inability to fulfill the demands of God’s law. Here the underlying reason is newly stated, namely that his mind is set on the flesh. This fully comports with the persona, who is “of the flesh, sold under sin” (7:14) and cries, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (7:18). Indeed, the cries of the persona end under condemnation as one who cannot please God, just as Paul writes in 8:8, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Accordingly, immediately following these words Paul rehearses the shift that chapter 8 represents and reminds his Christian readers, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (8:9).

While this objection appears to carry some weight on the surface, it is not without clear and compelling resolve.

## THE PERSONA THANKS GOD FOR CHRIST BEFORE CONCLUDING

Then there is the objection that the persona thanks God for Christ before concluding. I refer the reader to the grammar section above entitled, “Disclosure Formula.” This objection is dealt with at some length there. I will only summarize with two observations.



First, as noted above, this arrangement fits rhetorically and is demonstrable in other soliloquies. Other grammatical marks offer support for the idea that Paul is interjecting a comment that deliberately connects with his audience before returning to his character for the conclusion.

Second, taking this thanksgiving statement parenthetically makes the most sense of the immediate language, tone, and flow. It also is the best fit within the discourse and its contextual argument. The question that all expositors must wrestle with is why does Paul revert back to a final lament after heartily giving thanks? Indeed, “It is scarcely conceivable that, after giving thanks to God for deliverance, Paul should describe himself as being in exactly the same position as before.”<sup>222</sup> Longenecker after consider alternatives, reasons that it is “far better to understand the exclamatory statement of 7:25a, ‘But thanks be to God, [deliverance is] through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ as a ‘parenthetical interjection’ that Paul inserted into his ‘speech in character’ presentation of 7:14–25.”<sup>223</sup> It is not uncommon for Paul to interject parenthetical exclamations of thanksgiving in his letters.<sup>224</sup> In fact, a similar interjection is evidenced in chapter 6:16-20, where Paul writes, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed” (6:17).

This objection, though a good observation, does not upset the discourse when considered with other grammatical and rhetorical factors. Instead, it seems to best fit a pattern that only strengthens the case against the Augustinian view.

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<sup>222</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Romans*, 114–15.

<sup>223</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 671.

<sup>224</sup> Clear examples include 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 2:14; 8:16; and 9:15.

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