

2000

Simul Justus et Peccator? A Closer Look at the "ego" of Romans 7:14-25

Zane G. Yi

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yi, Zane G., "Simul Justus et Peccator? A Closer Look at the "ego" of Romans 7:14-25" (2000). *Senior Research Projects*. 79.
https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research/79

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Southern Scholars at KnowledgeExchange@Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Research Projects by an authorized administrator of KnowledgeExchange@Southern. For more information, please contact jspears@southern.edu.

Simul Justus et Peccator?
A Closer Look at the "ego" of Romans 7:14-25

By

Zane G. Yi

Submitted to fulfill

the requirements of

The Southern Scholars Honors Program

Southern Adventist University

April 7, 2000

ΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ (Romans 7:14-25)

7.14-25

14. οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν, ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός
we know¹ for that the law spiritual is I but fleshy (of flesh)²
εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν.
I am sold³ under the sin.

15. ὃ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω· οὐ γὰρ ὃ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω,
what for will produce⁴ not I know. Not for the I wish this I practice
ἀλλ' ὃ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ.

But what I hate this I do

16. εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καὶ ὡς.
if but what not I wish this I do, I affirm⁵ the law that [is] good.

17. νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ
now but no longer I I work⁶ it but the indwelling⁷ in me
ἁμαρτία.
sin.

18. οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἐστίν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου,
I know for that not dwells in me, this is in the flesh my,
ἀγαθόν· τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάτῃ, εὐδὲ τὸ
good; the for to wish is present⁸ to me, the but to produce⁹ the
καλὸν οὐ.
good [is] not;

19. οὐ γὰρ ὃ θέλω τοιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὃ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τοῦτο
not for what I wish I do good, but what not I wish evil this
πράσσω.
I practice.

20. εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ θέλω ἐγὼ τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ
if but what not I wish I this I do, no longer I I work it
ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία.
but the indwelling in me sin.

¹ 1st person plural perfect active indicative. οἶδα

² instead of σαρκικός as used in Romans 8:5 referring having a carnal mind.

³ nominative singular masculine perfect passive participle. πιπράσκω. "to be a slave to, to be devoted."

⁴ 1st person singular present middle/passive deponent, indicative. "to work out; to effect, to produce, bring out as a result." (note the shift of present tense from this point forward.)

⁵ 1st person singular present indicative. "to affirm, to assent"

⁶ 1st person singular present middle/passive deponent indicative. "to work out, to effect, produce, bring out as a result."

⁷ Nominative singular feminine present active participle.

⁸ 3rd person, singular, present, middle/passive, deponent, indicative παράκειμαι "to lie near, be adjacent; to be at hand, be present."

⁹ Present, middle/passive, deponent, infinitive. κατεργάζομαι "to work out; to effect, to produce, bring out as a result."

21. Εὕρισκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, τῷ θέλοντι ἔμοι ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, ὅτι
I find then the law, the wishing¹⁰ me to do the good, that
ἔμοι τὸ κακὸν παράκειται·

to me the evil it is present;

22. συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,

I delight in¹¹ for the law of the God according to the inner man,

23. βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἄντιστρατευόμενον

I see but different law in the members¹² my warring against¹³

τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοοῦ καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς
the law of the mind my and taking captive¹⁴ me in the law of the
ἀμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου.

sin the being¹⁵ in the members my

24. ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ρύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ

Wretched¹⁶ I am man; who me rescue¹⁷ from the body the

θανάτου τούτου.

of death this.

25. χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. ἄρα οὖν

grace but of God through Jesus Christ the Lord our. Then so

αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοὶ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ

myself I the on one hand mind I serve law God the but on the other hand flesh law

ἀμαρτίας.

of sin.

¹⁰ Dative, singular, masculine, present, active, participle

¹¹ 1st person singular, present, middle/passive, deponent, indicative “to delight in, approve cordially.”

¹² “members, limb, any part of the body” see also Romans 12:4.

¹³ Accusative, singular, masculine, present, middle/passive, deponent, participle. “to war against, to contravene, to oppose.”

¹⁴ Accusative, singular, masculine, present, active, participle “to lead captive, to subject.”

¹⁵ Dative, singular, masculine, present, participle εἰμι.

¹⁶ “wretched, miserable, afflicted.”

¹⁷ 3rd person, singular, future, middle, deponent, indicative ρυομαι “to drag out of danger, to rescue, save.”

Romans 7:14-25 (NASB)¹

14. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23. but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Introduction

Civil war in man between reasons and passions.

If there were only reason without passions.

If there were only passions without reason.

But since he has both he cannot be free from war, for he can only be at peace with the one if he is at war with the other.

Thus he is always torn by inner divisions and contradictions.²

For many believers, these words so cogently penned by Pascal are reminiscent of words that are found in the Bible. Paul writes in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (NIV). Through the history of the church, this text has been used to express the angst of frustrated Christians. They are sincere

¹ *The Bible*. New American Standard Bible.

All text references in this paper will be taken from the New American Standard Bible translation unless otherwise indicated.

² Blaise Pascal. *Pensees*. Trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 235.

in their faith and want to live righteously but find themselves at times feeling and acting contrary to the ideal they profess. The famous phrase “simul justus et peccator”—at the same time righteous and sinner—was coined by Martin Luther after studying this text.³

However, beyond a cursory reading, one finds that things are not as simple as they seem. The apostle Peter described some aspects of Paul’s letters “hard to understand” (II Peter 3:16). This portion of Romans proves to be such a case. The “I” referred to in this segment of Scripture has proved to be an enigma for scholars—it is termed as “a battleground for theologians.” In Romans 7, Paul becomes uncharacteristically self-referential. It is the first “I” that appears in the letter after a usage in Romans 3:7 and appears 28 times between verses 7-25 of chapter 7.

Throughout the history of the church, varying interpretations for the text have been offered. For some exegetes, Romans 7 “has played a central role in the history of psychological exegesis of Paul.”⁴ Others state that this passage cannot refer to Paul because of its incongruence with his other statements. The discussion proves to be more than “theological hairsplitting.” One’s interpretation of this text involves his/her understanding of Pauline theology as a whole—particularly in respects to anthropology and soteriology.

Linguistically speaking, the interpretation of “I” is the question of referent.⁵ To whom does the pronoun “I” refer? C.E.B. Cranfield offers some answers to this “hotly disputed” subject. In his commentary on Romans, Cranfield lists the seven views offered on the first person singular of Romans 7.

³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. J.T. Mueller. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 98.

⁴ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*. Trans. John P. Galvin. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

1. The "I" is autobiographical, the reference is to Paul's present experience as a Christian.
2. It is autobiographical, referring to his past experience (before his conversion) as seen by him at the time referred to.
3. "I" is autobiographical, the reference is to his pre-converted state, but as seen by him in the present in the light of his Christian faith.
4. It presents the experience of the non-Christian Jew, as seen by himself.
5. It presents the experience of the non-Christian Jew, as seen through Christian eyes.
6. It presents the experience of the Christian who is living at a level of the Christian life, which can be left behind, who is still trying to fight the battle in his own strength.
7. It presents the experience of Christians in general, including the best and the most mature.⁶

John A. T. Robinson summarizes the major issues of the dispute succinctly.

Quite apart from the details of exegesis, . . . two questions have agitated interpreters: (a) Does the use of the first person singular indicate genuine autobiography? — or is it simply cast in the first person for vividness?, and (b) Does it refer to the Christian or to the pre-Christian state — is the use of the present from verse 14 onwards again merely for vividness. is the use of the present from verse 14 onwards again merely for vividness.⁷

It is the purpose of this paper to present an overview of the differing interpretations of this text and to present an answer to these questions.

Who is the "I" of Romans 7:14-25? This study will show that this is actually a secondary issue in approaching this text. Nevertheless, we will seek an answer. Although the arguments for each viewpoint is strong, this paper will favor the view that "I" is an autobiographical account of Paul's personal struggle with the power of sin and applicable to the present struggle within every believer. It is a "holy tension" that will be unresolved until the second-coming of Christ.

⁵ Michael Middendorf, *Semantics, Referent, and Pragmatic*.
(www.issuesetc.com/resource/archives/middendf.htm)

⁶ C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1985), 156, 57.

⁷ John A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 82.

Structural Analysis

Before going further, it may prove helpful to become more familiar with the text under scrutiny. Observe the parallelism found between 7:14-17 and 7:18-23.

14. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17. So now, not longer am I the one doing, it, but sin which dwells in me."	18. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21. I find then, the principle that evil is present in me, the one wants to do good. 22. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23. but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.
--	---

The apostle Paul was probably cognizant of the fact that his letter would most likely be heard, rather than read by the original recipients. He therefore repeats himself, expressing the same idea in similar words. The "I" that Paul describes faces the division between what he/she wills and what he/she actually does. The duality here is between will and action, between intention and performance.⁸ Notice the parallels. In both segments, the "I" confesses the law of God as being good, both find "evil" or "sin" within themselves. Both express the frustration of the division between willing and doing.

Within the pericope of 7:14-25, the pronoun "ἐγώ" is used 6 times and 20 verbs are used in the 1st person singular.

⁸ Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*. Trans. Carl. C. Rasmussen. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), 293.

*Note also the duality here is not within the will or mind, but with willing and doing.

“I” is Autobiographical

The most natural way to read this section is to believe that the author is referring to himself when he uses the pronoun “I.” This would then imply that the apostle Paul struggled with sin. Whether this is pre-conversion or post-conversion state will be discussed later. Commentators have noted that the existential anguish described here could only be from experience. James Stewart observes, “If ever words bore all the evidences of having been wrung from the agony of a man’s own soul, these poignant sentences most surely do. No literary convention makes a man speak as Paul has spoken here. In his very heart’s blood this page was written.”⁹ C.L. Mitton also agrees, “This is no mere literary device. Clearly the Apostle speaks of that which is very real to him in his own experience.”¹⁰ C.H. Dodd is convinced that this section carries “the unmistakable note of autobiography.”¹¹ Also, the use of αὐτὸς ἐγώ in vs. 25 is an emphatic self-reference, literally meaning “I myself,” and grammatically supports the autobiographical view.

If the “I” does indeed refer to Paul, the question inevitably rises, What did Paul struggle with? What period of his life do these verses depict? Robert Gundry argues that before Paul became a Christian, he struggled with lust. Gundry sees Romans 7:7-13 as referring to Paul reaching the status of bar mitzvah. At the age of 12, Jewish boys officially became “sons of the Law.”

“He singles out a particular commandment to establish his autobiographical point and only then refers to an early period of freedom from law...When sin finally springs to life, it does so in response to the particular commandment just cited...The commandment Paul singles out prohibits lust, the very sin which, in it’s sexual sense, is dead (i.e., inactive—see Jas. 2:17, 26) prior to

⁹ James Stewart, *A Man in Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 99.

¹⁰ C.L. Mitton, “Romans 7 Reconsidered,” *Expository Times*, 65:78.

¹¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 107.

puberty it springs to life (i.e., becomes active) in a lad about the time he becomes bar mitzvah and there for legally and morally responsible.”¹²

Others who argue that this is a description of Paul before his conversion describe a man torn between the requirements of the Law and his failure to met them. One commentator puts it this way,

“In this conflict Saul lived, as Pharisee and persecutor. Heavier and heavier did the curse of the Law become to him, the more he studied it and the more exactly he tried to keep the commandment. The ‘principle’ of which he had heard, and which he had fancied was easy to overcome, became for him a visible personal reality; and it was just his vehement, proud and fiery temperament that longed after good so passionately, just this separated him farther and farther away from God. What struggles must have raged through his conscience, until, conquered at last, he breaks out in the despairing cry: ‘I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present in me, but to do that which is good is not. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me!’”¹³

This passage is a description of Paul before he was converted to Christ on the road to Damascus. Chapter 8 then serves as Paul’s experience as a Christian. “Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” (8:1)

“I” is Not Autobiographical

Until W.G. Kummel published *Rom 7 and die Bekehrung des Paulus* (“Romans 7 and the Conversion of Paul”) in 1929, it was widely viewed that the “ego” of Romans 7 was autobiographical.¹⁴ In this work, Kummel presents three strong arguments against the autobiographical view. He contends that Paul uses “I” here in the rhetorical sense. It

¹² Robert Gundry, “The Moral Frustration of Paul Before His Conversion: Sexual Lust in Romans 7:7-25,” *Pauline Studies*. Ed. Donald A. Hagner. (Grand Rapids: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 232.

¹³ James D.G. Dunn, “Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul.” *Theologische Zeitschrift*, September/October, 1975. Available online <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XXXI/31-8.htm>.

*quoteing from H. Weinel, *St. Paul, the Man and His Work* (1906), 74.

¹⁴ Since the author of this paper (me) has not developed a proficiency in the German language, he has referred to a summary provided by Gerd Theissen in *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*.

illustrates a general train of thought and excludes Paul himself.¹⁵ This can be supported by the text in Romans itself. In vs. 9 of this chapter Paul states, "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died." This, Kummel points out, is not biographical of Paul's experience. Paul had been born as Jew and never lived "without the Law" even in his pre-Christian state.¹⁶ Kummel goes on to state that Romans 7:7ff contradicts Philippians 3:4-6. In Philippians 3:6, Paul states that he "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." The "I" in Romans 7, however, views himself as a "wretched man" (7:24) incapable of fulfilling the requirements of the Law. Since the Philippians text is viewed to be biographical, and since Romans 7 stands in direct contradiction, Paul cannot be speaking about his personal experience.¹⁷

This view has several strengths in that it picks out contradictions even within the letter of Romans itself. The cry in Romans 7:23, for example, "but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members," are inharmonious with Paul's other statements. In vs. 6 of the same chapter, Paul is optimistic, "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." Paul's triumphant cry of 8:2 "For the Law of the Spirit is life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death," is opposed to the cry of the "wretched man" of 7:14. Kummel argues that this cannot be the same person. He argues that the condition of the man in vs. 14-25 is different from the situation in Galatians 5:17. Paul writes in Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the

¹⁵ George Werner Kummel. *Romer 7 Und Die Bekehrung des Paulus*. Reprint. (Lexington: The Keystone Printery Inc., 1965), 67-90, 118-32.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 78-84.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 111-17.

flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do as you please.” Here the man has a choice between walking in the Spirit, and walking by flesh. The man in Romans 7 seems to have no choice. He is a literally a slave.

In this view of Romans 7, the “I” is merely a literary device, replacing the generic term “one” as the subject of the sentence. For example, the meaning of the text would not lose meaning if it read, “For what *one* is doing, *one* does not understand; for what *one* is not practicing what *one* would want to do, but *one* is doing the very thing one hates....” Paul is not speaking of his personal experience, past or present, but figuratively.

Paul did not suffer from a guilt ridden complex. One commentator notes, “The Damascus event is hardly the conversion of a despairing sinner but the calling and overthrow of a self righteous Pharisee.”¹⁸ This seems consistent with the description that Paul gives of himself in Galatians 1:13 “For you have heard of my former manner of life Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.”

Another major proponent of the view that Paul is not writing autobiographically in vs. 14-17 is Krister Stendahl, a Lutheran professor at the Harvard School of Divinity. His book *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, published in 1976, is a collection of essays that challenges the traditional ways of understanding the apostle Paul.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed. by Gerhard Kittel. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1964), 358.

¹⁹ Stendahl has some liberal views, believing Paul only wrote/dicated/signed some of the letters attributed to him. He limits Pauline authorship to 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans. He views Paul as “a great theologian—with his own special flaws.”

Stendahl deals with the interpretation of Romans 7 in his essay, *The Apostle Paul and The Introspective Conscience of the West*. In this essay, he maintains “the Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther’s struggle with his conscience.”²⁰ The common interpretation of Romans 7:14-21 is influenced by the western culture’s problem with introspection. He observes that sermons and writings of the Eastern tradition²¹ contain little interest on “justification.” This observation on the difference between Eastern and Western traditions seems to be supported by Phillip Samaan who comments, “It is interesting to note that Eastern Christianity does not have a speculative and abstruse type of spirituality, but rather focuses on living in everyday situations...Eastern Orthodoxy has not such thing as theoretical spirituality.”²² Stendahl notes that the concept of justification by faith (alone) is strangely absent from the teachings of the church until 300 years after the writing of Romans. It was introduced by St. Augustine, who also wrote his highly introspective spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions*. Introspection reached its spiritual climax in Luther, and Augustinian monk, and the Reformation. In the secular, western world, the climax was reached through the writing of Sigmund Freud.

“The introspective conscience is a Western development and a Western plague.”²³ In Stendahl’s observations, the apostle Paul did not struggle with a guilty conscious. Like, Kummel, He quotes Philippians 3:4-6 where Paul says “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” This, to Stendahl, means “he [Paul] experiences no troubles, no problems, no qualms of conscience, no feelings of shortcoming.” The cry in Romans 7: 24,

²⁰ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1976), 79.

²¹ the Greek Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Syriac Church, the Coptic Church, the Mar Thoma church.

²² Phillip Samaan. *Christ’s Way to Spiritual Growth*. (Hagarstown: Review and Herald, 1995), 15.

²³ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 17.

“Wretched man that I am...!” does not arise from his statement of “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.” Rather it is from the statement, “But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, *I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.*” “The argument is one of acquittal of the ego, not one of utter contrition.”²⁴ He summarizes, “We should venture to suggest that the West for centuries has wrongly surmised that the biblical writers were grappling with problems which no doubt are ours, but which never entered their conscience.”²⁵

Autobiographical or non-autobiographical?

After over viewing the conflicting views, one is left with three options for understanding “I”. They are listed as follows

1. As a personal “I” where Paul is speaking of himself distinguished from others. An example of this usage can be found in 1 Corinthians 15:9. “For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”
2. As a typical “I” where Paul speaks of himself but includes others, such as Jews, Christians, or the human race in general. This can be the usage found in Galatians 2:20 where Paul states, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...”
3. As a fictive “I” where Paul presents a general idea without including himself. In I Corinthians 10:28ff, he speaks this way for “the strong man.” “If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks.”²⁶

Of these three views, it is most likely that the second one that applies to this case. Paul does speak from personal experience. It seems that when Paul speaks in a rhetorical view, the phrase is introduced with the word “if.”²⁷ Romans 7:14-25 is not preceded with “if.” The frustration so poignantly depicted here can only come from a personal experience. Paul may

²⁴ *ibid.*, 93.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 95.

²⁶ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*.

²⁷ “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...” (I Corinthians 13:1).

be using this to describe the typical experience of all Christians, but it remains his as well. As Dunn remarks, "...it seems to me a rather convoluted process of reasoning which argues both that the "T" does not denote Paul's personal experience but that it does denote the experience of everyman-everyman, except Paul."²⁸

Old or New Man?

More heatedly debated than if Paul is speaking autobiographically or not, is the issue of if he is describing man in his pre-Christian or during his Christian experience. The views once again vary. To the frustration of many, both sides present strong points. Great names in the world of Christianity, through history support both views. Theologians like Origin, Wesley, Johannes Weiss, J. Moffatt, Bultmann, Kummel and C.H. Dodd support the pre-conversion view. Other giants such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, and Nygren support the post-conversion view. They view this tension as a permanent and significant element in the mature Christian life.

The early church, with the Greek Fathers, generally understood the "T" to represent the unconverted man, still under the law. Augustine changed his views and became the first major church leader to teach that these statements describe the believer. This view was carried over by the church of the Middle ages and accepted in different forms by Martin Luther and other Reformers. This view was then rejected by Pietism. "For Pietism, with its view of the meaning of the Christian life and of sanctification, it was utterly inconceivable that Paul might speak in this way about his new life as a Christian."²⁹

²⁸ James D.G. Dunn, "Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul."

²⁹ Alders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 285.

The answer the question, as Robinson put it, “will largely depend on one’s own experience of what being a Christian means. It is no good only looking at Paul: one must look within. The Armenian finds one thing, the Calvinist another – and who is to say which understands Paul better?”³⁰ In seeking to understand this text, we must approach the text prayerfully, aware of our own presuppositions and experiences that will inevitably shape our interpretation.

Pre-Conversion View

Some commentators are avidly opposed to the idea that this is a description of Christian experience. It paints a dismal picture of the Christian walk, differing from more positive descriptions found in places like Romans 5:1 where Paul writes, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” If this were the description of Christian experience “What would be the use of the new birth or redemption at all, if it did end that miserable stress and slavery?” asks one such commentator.³¹ Others, such as A.E. Garvie, believe this deprecates the power of God’s grace, making the power of sin and law more powerful. He argues, “To apply all that precedes this verse [7:25] to Paul as a Christian, however, would be to admit practically that the grace of God is as powerless against sin as the law is.”³²

Those who hold this view, explain that Romans 7:7-25 is an elaboration of 7:5 which states, “For while we were in flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” This clearly describes the condition of the unconverted/unregenerate man. Therefore, verses 14-25 also describe the pre-

³⁰ John A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans*, 84.

³¹ C.L. Mitton, “Romans 7 Reconsidered,” 79. quoting J. Wiess.

³² *ibid.*, 79. quoting Garvey.

conversion experience. On the other hand chapter 8:1-17 expands on Romans 7:6 which declares, “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

This section can be structured as follows:

- A (7:5) Life under the law: Unconverted or pre-converted state described.
- B (7:6) Life in the Spirit: Life of converted believer described.
- A' (7:7-25) Life under the Law elaborated.
- B' (8:1-17) Life in the Spirit elaborated.³³

Furthermore, they argue, those who argue in favor of the Christian experience place an unnatural division between 7:13 and 14. In vs. 13 Paul explains that it is sin that is responsible for death, not the law. 7:14 continues this idea, “For we know the law is spiritual...” Since 7:7-13 clearly describes the condition of the unconverted person, 7:14 and following, also describe the same state. To make a drastic switch from unconverted description to a converted position is destroys the continuity of the text.

Structurally, this view faces the challenge of dealing with the somber conclusion of 7:25. “So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” This seems to be anti-climactic to Paul’s cry at the beginning of that verse “ Thanks, be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” and also gives strong support to the view that this is the description of the Christian experience. James Moffatt, in his translation of the Bible, moved this latter portion of vs. 25 to follow the end of vs. 23. This, in his opinion, would bring a more harmonious transition from chapter 7 to 8. C.H. Dodd supports Moffatt’s translation and suggests that 25b is a “primitive corruption” of manuscript that has be preserved and passed down. Although he does acknowledge there is no

manuscript evidence for this speculation, he states, “We cannot avoid trusting our own judgement against the [manuscript’s] evidence.”³⁴ Although it is possible that “a clarifying side note on a manuscript may have been incorporated by a later copyist into the text itself at the wrong place,”³⁵ many are uncomfortable with this conjecture, especially without solid exegetical support. It is an extremely shaky foundation to build an argument.

Another argument of the pre-conversion view is that to except the post-conversion view would present a bleak picture of Christian experience. Are believers “sold into bondage to sin” (7:14)?³⁶ If so, this presents a contradiction to other statements like 6:14, where Paul tells the Romans, “For sin shall not be a master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” In Romans 8:2, Paul writes, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Compared to these statements, the “wretched man” of Romans 7 seems to be in an unconverted state.

Some scholars find Paul’s statement in Romans 7:15, “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate,” to have strong parallels with statements made by other classical authors. Philosophers have observed the tension between reason and human passion. Socrates, for example, blamed ignorance as the fiend behind human evil. It is argued that since these authors are clearly non-Christian, the struggle they describe, and hence, the struggle that Paul writes of, is that of the unregenerate man. These are some of the parallels cited:

“I see the better part and approve it; but I follow the worse”
(*Metamorphosis* 7.21).

- Ovid (43 BC - AD 17)

³³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 385.

³⁴ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 107.

³⁵ C.L. Mitton, “Romans 7 Reconsidered,” 100.

³⁶ It is argued that only a Christian would declare that he had been “sold as a slave” to sin, because sin blinds those it enslaves. Paul as a Christian, is then reflecting back on the days he did not know Christ.

"...most people...say that many, while knowing what is best refuse to perform it" (*Protagorus* 352d).

- Plato (427-347 BC)

"An uncontrolled man does what he knows to be wrong under the influence of emotion" (*Ethica Nicomachea* 7.2).

- Aristotle (384-322 BC)

"That which is good we learn and recognize, yet practice not the lesson, some from sloth, and some preferring pleasure in the stead of duty" (*Hippolytus* 379-83).

- Euripides (c. 480-406 BC)

"I knew what I ought to be, but, unhappy that I am, I could not do it" (*Trinummas* 657-58).

- Plautus (c. 254-184 BC)³⁷

However, those who believe that Paul is talking about his Christian experience, respond by arguing that Paul and the pagan classical authors may be using similar terminology but are speaking with differing presuppositions on the nature of evil and man.

The struggle described here is also not foreign to Jewish thought. One catches a glimpse of it in certain books of the Apocrypha.

"And thy glory went through four gates, of fire, and of earthquake, and of wind, and of cold; that thou mightest give the law unto the seed of Jacob, and diligence unto the generation of Israel. *And yet tookest thou not away from them a wicked heart, that thy law might bring forth fruit in them.* For the first Adam bearing a *wicked heart* transgressed, and was overcome; and *so be all they that are born of him.* Thus infirmity was made permanent; and the law (also) in the heart of the people with the malignity of the root; so that the good departed away, and the evil abode still. (4 Ezra 3:19-22) KJV (italics supplied)

"For we that have received the law perish by sin, and our heart also which received it. Notwithstanding the law perisheth not, but remaineth in his force." (4 Ezra 9:36-37) KJV

³⁷ Ronald V. Huggins, *Alleged Classical Parallels to Paul's "What I Want To Do I Do Not Do, But What I Hate I Do" (Rom 7:15)*.

Online: <http://www.ici.edu/journals/wtj/9095/wtj216.htm>.

Huggins does an excellent job in defending the view that these quotes by classical authors do not parallel Paul in Romans 7:15. He argues that Paul's anthropology and ethics differs from that of Socrates, Aristotle, and the "Fatal Fault" motif. Huggins believes that the "I" in this section is the experience of a man already "in Christ."

The argument can once again be made, as with the pagan authors, that this is the cry of one that does not know Christ. The Jew may have the Law and seek to do right, but he does not have the peace and joy that comes from receiving salvation through Christ.

Proponents of the pre-conversion view are also point to the fact that 7:14-25 is void of references to Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. The more prominent words are “I”, “my”, “Law”, “sin”, “dead”, and “death.” Comparing the this section to chapter 8, Mitton comments, “Especially we notice that the name of Jesus Christ does not appear once; nor is there one single reference to the Holy Spirit. In this respect we find the name of Jesus Christ three times in the first three verses, and the Spirit is mentioned a dozen times in the first sixteen verses.” It is argued that in Romans 7, the “I” seems to be self-centered (unconverted), whereas in Romans 8, it is Christ-centered (Christian).

In summary, this view has several strong points. Structurally, it can be argued that 7:14-25 is an elaboration of 7:5. It is also true, that the cry of the “wretched” man is far from the descriptions of victory in chapters 6 and 8. This struggle that is depicted here could be similar to that described by pagan authors. This section is also void of Christian terminology such as Jesus or the Holy Spirit. “The seventh chapter depicts a dark picture of a servant of sin, while the sixth and the eight depict the ideal Christian experience. How is possible for Paul to be both at the same time? He found either enslavement, or victory in Christ. It may be asked, if freedom cannot be found in the law, and it cannot be found in Christ, the it is futility to have either.”³⁸

³⁸ James Paton, “Romans Chapter Seven.” Online: <http://ldl.net/~cartbury/jeffpaton6.html>.

Christian Experience

Other theologians believe that Paul is writing about a permanent and significant predicament of the mature Christian life. The believer lives in a state of holy tension, of desiring an ideal, but falling short in reality. St. Augustine was perhaps the first proponent of this view. It seems his view was influenced his struggle against the Pelagian heresy.³⁹ Pelagius taught that man's will combined with asceticism could enable the Christian to attain the highest level of virtue. His ideas were heavily influenced Stoic philosophy. "The value of Christ's redemption was, in his opinion, limited mainly to instruction (*doctrina*) and example (*exemplum*), which the Savior threw into the balance as a counterweight against Adam's wicked example, so that nature retains the ability to conquer sin and to gain eternal life even without the aid of grace."⁴⁰ Augustine may have changed his view to emphasize the constant need of God grace and the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Some consider this a "deviant" view in the course of church history. Nevertheless, the supports are also very convincing.

A significant grammatical argument is the deliberate, but almost indistinct shift, to the present tense in 7:14ff. Previous to this verse the verbs are in aorist and imperfect tenses. In verses 7:7-13, Paul writes in the past tense, speaking of an experience that is behind him. In verse 14 onward, he begins to use the present tense.⁴¹ "The fact that Paul does not make much of the transition, that his thought moves from past to present almost unconsciously, underlines

³⁹ The tenants of Pelagius' teachings can be summarized as such: 1. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died. 2. Adam's sin harmed only himself, not the human race. 3. Children just born are in the same state as Adam before his fall. 4. The whole human race neither dies through Adam's sin or death, nor rises again through the resurrection of Christ. 5. The (Mosaic Law) is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel. 6. Even before the advent of Christ there were men who were without sin. (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XI)

⁴⁰ *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XI*, Copyright © 1911 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 1999 by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>.

⁴¹ Those who view 14-25 as an elaboration of 7-13 explain the shift by stating it achieves greater vividness.

the degree of continuity which Paul recognizes between his pre-Christian experience and his experience as a Christian.”⁴² Also, in 7:7 the tense of the verb ᾔδειν (to know) is in the pluperfect with an imperfect sense, which emphasizes the beginning of a continuing experience.

Another strong argument to this view is the second half of 7:25. We have discussed previously how the supporters of the pre-conversion view have actually moved the placement of this verse. However, if one is faithful to the exegetical evidence, Paul closes this section on a resigned note. “So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” James Dunn concludes by stating, “In short, if Romans 7:24 is the believer’s life-long cry of frustration, 7:25a is his thanksgiving of eschatological hope, and 7:25b his calm realism for the present in light of both.”⁴³

It is also reasoned that the tension described here is not because one is unconverted. Rather, the desire to do God’s will and to also follow his law indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit and the converted mind. “In fact, a struggle as serious as that which is here described, can only take place where the Spirit of God is present and active.”⁴⁴ “The struggle so vividly depicted in Rom. 7:14-25 does not end when the Spirit comes; on the contrary, that is when it really begins.”⁴⁵ The scholars that argue this post-conversion view quote Galatians 5:17, where they read that Paul describes the same struggle. “For the flesh sets its desire against Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

⁴² James D.G. Dunn, “Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul.”

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Shorter Commentary*, 158.

⁴⁵ James D.G. Dunn, “Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul.”

It is also important to take the “already/not yet” aspect of Paul’s theology into consideration. There are promises of the gospel already being fulfilled, but the ultimate fulfillment is yet to come. “The dying of conversion-initiation therefore is only the beginning of a process, process of dying to the old fleshy nature, a life-long process which will not be completed till the resurrection or transformation of the body.”⁴⁶ The “already/not yet” motif is not isolated to the teaching of Paul. For example, Jesus’ declaration of the Kingdom of God can be understood this way.⁴⁷

<i>Already:</i>	<i>But Not Yet:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ is returning, is saving, is loving, is redeeming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is Christ fully returned.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kingdom is being built in our hearts and lives, God’s will is being done on earth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the Kingdom established everywhere, so the Father’s will is done on Earth <i>just as it is in Heaven</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blind see. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do all see.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sick are healed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has sickness be eliminated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dead are raised to eternal life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do all have eternal life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is being evangelized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has all the world come to the good news.

Likewise, Paul believes that the believer is justified through faith, yet is being sanctified and will one day be glorified. Perfection is not a destination or a goal, but a process. That is why he writes in his letter to the Philippians,

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I don not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:12-14).

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Tom Sine, *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*.

Online: <http://users.exis.net/~frimmin/Faith/milljesusend.html#not yet>.

“For Paul, the believer is caught between fulfillment and consummation; he lives in the overlap of ages, where the new age of the resurrection life has already begun, but the old age of existence in the flesh has not ended, where the final work of God has begun in him but is not yet completed.”⁴⁸ The time between Christ’s resurrection and his return is an interval of tension between the flesh and Spirit.

This is why he writes in Romans 7:22, “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man...” The “inner man” refers to the new nature received by the Spirit. It is used this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”⁴⁹ This “inner man” is also synonymous with “mind”⁵⁰ and in Romans 12:2 that is being renewed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the regeneration of the mind.⁵¹ At the same time, he is still “of flesh” (7:14). Paul here is not describing some form of Gnostic dualism. Rather he is expressing the fact that he is still a human. He uses the word “σάρκινος” and not “σάρκιος.” The latter is the word used for “carnally minded” and the former for “made of flesh.”⁵²

Full deliverance from this struggle comes in the future at the *eschaton* (second coming). Paul seems to express this idea in Romans 8:23.

“And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” (Romans 8:23-25)

⁴⁸ James D.G. Dunn, “Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul.”

⁴⁹ See also Colossians 3:9ff and Eph. 4:22ff.

⁵⁰ Thomas R. Schriener, *Romans*, 377.

⁵¹ In Titus 3:5, Paul describes “the washing of regeneration and renewing of by the Holy Spirit.”

⁵² John A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans*, 89; Anders Nygren, *Commentary*, 299.

The conflict within is at times quite intense and the possibility of apostasy, or falling away from the faith, is a reality for the believer. James Dunn poignantly puts it this way, "There are only two ways of escape, and both are ways of death: one is the way forward-to engage in the Spirit/flesh conflict till its end in physical death; the other is the way backward-to abandon the conflict, to retreat into a life solely on the level of the flesh, the level where death alone reigns, the way of death. In short, the only way of escape is death-either the death of the body, or the death of the whole man."⁵³

Another reason the post conversion view is appealing to many is that it resonates a common fiber of existential reality in the believer. For many, the cry of the "wretched man" is their cry as well. Cranfield eloquently elucidates:

"When Christians fail to take account of the fact that they (and all their fellow-Christians also) are still slaves under sin's power 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 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. At the same time it must be said with emphasis that the realistic recognition that we are still indeed slaves under sin's power should be no encouragement to us to wallow complacently in our sins."⁵⁴

James Dunn believes this interpretation has important practical implications. He expresses concern that a one-sided presentation of the Christian experience may be deceitful and even damaging in the long run. He warns the reader that:

"Proclamation of the gospel which promises only pardon, peace and power will result in converts who sooner or later become disillusioned or deceitful about their Christian experience...paradox and conflict is an integral part of the religious experience."⁵⁵

⁵³ James D.G. Dunn, "Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul."

⁵⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Shorter Commentary*, 165.

⁵⁵ James D.G. Dunn, "Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul."

Like the pre-conversion view, the view that Paul is writing here about his Christian experience proves to have some compelling arguments for its case. The subtle, yet deliberate switch to the present tense in vs. 14 gives strong support to this position. Also, it is plausible that this section could fit into the already/not aspects of Paul's theology. The struggle and tension depicted here can be seen, although not in this intensity, in Paul's other statements. The post-conversion view is also appealing because it is a realistic description of the experiences of many Christians. Lastly, the ambivalent and anti-climatic end of 7:25 gives the impression that Paul "lives as a sinner among sinners, not as a sinless saint among sinners."⁵⁶

Other Views

With both sides of the debate presenting such strong arguments, it becomes clear that a simple answer may not be tenable. There are some that have tried to amalgamate the two views. After presenting both sides of the argument, C.L. Mitton, concludes that it is not a description of the new man or old man. "It is rather the description of a man who is trying to live the good life, but doing it in his own strength, relying on his own resources, whether the period of his life be before his conversion to Christ or after it, in a later period of 'back-sliding,' when through carelessness the absolutely essential 'injection' of Divine power has been neglected."⁵⁷ He bases his view on "αὐτὸς ἐγώ" of 7:25, interpreting it as an idiom for "leaving God out," "on his own," and "relying on his own resources."⁵⁸ This can happen to the Christian as well as the non-Christian and places an emphasis on a constant reliance upon God.

⁵⁶ Anders Nygren, *Commentary*, 299.

⁵⁷ C.L. Mitton, "Romans 7 Reconsidered," 135.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 134.

Robert Mounce, on the other hand, believes that this section, along with Romans 8, is part of a “cyclical advance.” He presents the idea that a Christian grows in sanctification as he repeatedly cycles through these stages. “It probably is true that in the lives of the most earnest Christians the two conditions Paul described exists in a sort of cyclical advance. Recognition of our inability to live up to our deepest spiritual longings (chap. 7) leads us to cast ourselves upon God’s Spirit for power and victory (Chap. 8). Failure to continue in reliance upon the power of the Spirit places us once again in a position inviting defeat. Sanctification is a gradual process that repeatedly takes the believer through this recurring sequence of failure through dependency upon self to triumph through the indwelling Spirit.”⁵⁹ There are others that agree. One such theologian states, “There is a healthy realism about Romans 7:14-25.... Moreover, with the growth in holiness comes a deeper awareness of the powerlessness of the self...The more one experiences the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit, the more one recognizes the inadequacy of the autonomous self.”⁶⁰

Broader Context

After studying the various interpretations of this text, “One can really say that neither position has established itself against the other.”⁶¹ This is a frustrating position to be in. A very realistic possibility for the inability to find an answer is that perhaps the wrong question is being asked. Could be that we are looking for answers in a text that was not written to answer them? We this thought in mind we turn back to take a closer look at the text.

It is crucial that we take a look at the broader context of this pericope. Verses 14-25 are part of a larger picture. It is largely recognized that chapter 7:7-25 of Romans is an

⁵⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *The New American Commentary: Romans*. (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 157-58.

⁶⁰ J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books: 1993), 176.

⁶¹ John A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling With Romans*, 88.

explanation or defense of “the law.”⁶² In preceding parts of his letter, Paul had made some pretty strong statements about the law. He does not want not to be misunderstood as teaching anti-nomianism or stating that the law is evil. In Romans 5:20 he wrote, “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...” He states in Romans 6:14, “For sin shall no be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Even verses 1-6 of chapter 7 could be misunderstood as if Paul is speaking of the law as an evil, oppressive force. In actuality, the illustration of the husband and wife in chapter 7:1-6 is a clarification of the Romans 6:14. The believer has died to the law and is freed to serve in the “newness of the Spirit.”

He begins an explanation of the law in verse 7. “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?” He emphatically answers this question. “May it never be!” “For the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (vs. 12). Paul explains that the in vs. 7-13, that the problem is the power of sin, which uses the law to increase sin and bring death.

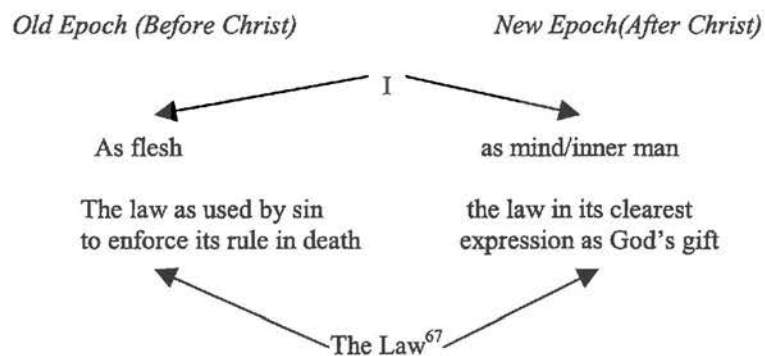
In verses of 14-25, Paul explains that the Law “is spiritual.” The use of the word “spiritual” to describe the Law is important. By doing so, he acknowledges that the origin of the Law is the Holy Spirit. To do this “breaks down the sharp contrast between the law and Spirit that in 7:6 no less strikingly then calling himself the bonds slave of sin.”⁶³ Paul here expresses “a duality” in the law. This corresponds with the division within himself. Once again, it needs to be stated that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” The problem is not the law. “The reason the law is transgressed is not because it is flawed or unspiritual but because human beings are fleshy and under the control of sin.”⁶⁴ The

⁶² James G.H. Dunn, *Word Bible Commentary, Volume 38A - Romans 1-8*. (Dallas: Word Book, 1988), 374-412.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 406.

⁶⁴ Thomas H. Schriener, *Romans*, 373.

“duality” in the law exists because of sin, which uses it to produce death.⁶⁵ “The split in the believing “I” matches the “split” in the law. The willing “I” agrees with the law and thus bears witness that it is good. “I” accept the law’s definition of God’s will, and desire to do it, but still “I” fail. The fault then lies not in the law; in this it is wholly blameless and praiseworthy. But neither does the fault lie in the “I,” even in the “I” who am “sold under sin.” Rather the fault lies with sin; the sin which dwells in me.”⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that this is the same defense he uses in 7:13 to exonerate the Law.



It is important to note that Paul here does not deny responsibility, but rather confesses his impotence against sin. He is emphasizing the power of sin.⁶⁸ The law and the “I” are both victims of sin, which brings death and division.

The text understood must be seen in its broader context. The apostle Paul is trying to make a point about the Law. “The law, although good, cannot be agent of transformation and

⁶⁵ There is a willing “I” = the “I” already identified with Christ in his death = the “I” no longer under the law of works but obedient to the law of faith, that is, to the law as spiritual. And there is an impotent “I” = the “I” as a man of flesh = the “I” not yet identified with Christ in his resurrection = the “I” still under the dominion of the law as used by sin to consign me to death. (as explained by Dunn in *The Word Bible Commentary*.)

⁶⁶ James G.H. Dunn, *Word Bible Commentary*, 407.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 398. (chart)

⁶⁸ Thomas H. Schriener, *Romans*, 374-75.

renewal, for the law itself does not bestow the ability to keep its commands.”⁶⁹ “...The passage does not intend to adjudicate between Christian and pre-Christian experience. It centers on the inherent inability of the law to transform...The law, although good, cannot be the agent of transformation and renewal, for the law itself does not bestow the ability to keep its command.”⁷⁰ The law apart from the Spirit does not transform. It kills.

However, it is section 14-25 that strikes a common chord in the reader. John C. Brunt points out that, “Paul’s third illustration is so powerfully poignant that few readers through history have talked about the point he makes, they have concentrated on the illustration itself.”⁷¹ The point in this illustration is that the problem does not lie in the Law, but sin, which is imbedded into “the fleshy nature.”

Conclusion

So who exactly is the “I” of Romans 7:14-25? Upon studying this text someone once commented. “Obviously the problem is a little too complicated to be solved by a single Yes or No.”⁷² Although arguments for each view are well founded, it is my conclusion that the view Paul is speaking autobiographically about his own experience, as a Christian, is most convincing. Structurally, the shift to the present tense in 7:14 and the anti-climatic ending of 7:25 strongly support this view. Also the mention of the “inner man” whom Paul uses in other places with the development of the Christian character is convincing evidence. This idea harmonizes well with the already/not aspect of Pauline eschatology. The believer will be free from this division when Christ returns. Chapter 7:14-25 does not present a complete picture of Christianity, yet it does present a realistic aspect of Christianity. We must remember, as

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 379.

⁷¹ John Brunt, *Romans: Mercy for All*. (Boise: Pacific Press, 1996), 147.

⁷² John A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans*, 88.

Cranfield points out, that neither chapter 7 or 8, if read in isolation, gives a true picture of Christianity. Both are elements of the believer's walk.

The ultimate issue behind understanding this text is not the issue of pre-conversion/post-conversion. Rather it reveals the power of sin and the inability of the Law to regenerate the human heart. "The contrast is not between what I was and what I am. The time-reference in 'am' is entirely unimportant.... The contrast, and it is a strong one, is not between what I was and am, but between the law and myself."⁷³ This contrast between the law and humanity will always exist until sin is destroyed at the second coming of Christ.

A study of Romans 7:14-25, this "battleground for theologians," reveals the battleground in the believer's heart. It is this heart the Spirit of God and the powers of darkness fiercely contend for control. It is into this heart that God offers to breathe the Spirit of a new life. It reveals the depth and power of sin on the human heart and at the same the grace and salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. In his letter to Timothy, Paul seems to express similar feelings of guilt and, at the same time, of joy in the grace that he has found through Jesus Christ.

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (I Timothy 1:12-15).

I believe this is his sentiment in Romans 7:14-25 as well.

⁷³ *ibid.*

Works Cited

- Brunt, John. *Romans: Mercy for All*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1996.
- Cranfield, C.E.B., *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1985.
- The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XI*, Copyright © 1911 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 1999 by Kevin Knight.
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>
- Dodd, C.H. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 193-.
- Dunn, James D.G. "Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul." *Theologische Zeitschrift*, September/October, 1975.
Online <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XXXI/31-8.htm>.
- , *Word Bible Commentary, Volume 38A - Romans 1-8*. Dallas: Word Book, 1988.
- Gundry, Robert. "The Moral Frustration of Paul Before His Conversion: Sexual Lust in Romans 7:7-25," *Pauline Studies*. Ed. Donald A. Hagner. Grand Rapids: The Paternoster Press, 1980.
- The Holy Bible*. Updated New American Standard. Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1999.
- Huggins, Ronald V., *Alleged Classical Parallels to Paul's "What I Want To Do I Do Not Do, But What I Hate I Do" (Rom 7:15)*.
Online: <http://www.ici.edu/journals/wtj/9095/wtj216.htm>
- Kummel, Werner George. *Romer 7 Und Die Bekehrung des Paulus*. Reprint. Lexington: The Keystone Printery Inc., 1965.
- Luther, Martin. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. J.T. Mueller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1962.
- Mitton, C.L., "Romans vii Reconsidered." *Expository Times*. 65:78-81, 99-103, 132-135.
- Mounce, Robert H. *The New American Commentary: Romans*. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
- Nygren, Anders. *Commentary on Romans*. Trans. Carl. C. Rasmussen. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees*. Trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books.1966.

- Paton, James. "Romans Chapter Seven." Online: <http://ldl.net/~cartbury/jeffpaton6.html>.
- Robinson, John A.T. *Wrestling with Romans*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979.
- Samaan, Philip. *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth*. Hagarstown: Review and Herald, 1995.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.
- Sine, Tom. *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*.
Online: <http://users.exis.net/~frimmin/Faith/milljesusend.html#not yet>
- Stendahl, K. *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1976.
- Stewart, James. *A Man in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975.
- Theissen, Gerd. *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*. Trans. John P. Galvin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed. by Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964 .

SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: ZANE YI Date: 1-10-99 Major: THEOLOGY

SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

*I plan to do an exegetical study on Romans 7:14-25.
I want to identify the "I" that struggles with sin.
This could be Paul speaking about himself or the experience
of humans in general. There is no debate as to whether
Paul is talking about the post "pre-conversion state
of the Christian."*

Signature of faculty advisor  Expected date of completion 3.30.2000

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned: yes

This is an "A" project: yes

This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit: yes

Advisor's Final Signature 

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: _____

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.