

## Start your study here

<b>Read</b> Read, Record, Reflect, Respond		<b>Intensively</b>	Questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How. . .
<b>Prayerfully</b>	Conscious dependence		Repeated Alike Different Accentuated Related
<b>Reflectively</b>	Constantly	<b>Specifically</b>	Purposefully—with the view of the author in mind
<b>Extensively</b>	Background issues Big Idea Basic structure and flow Broad strokes		<b>Effectively</b>
<b>Creatively</b>	Imagination and View points		

### Romans 7:13-25

13 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.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual,  
but I am of the flesh,  
sold under sin.

15 For I do not understand my own actions.  
For I do not do what I want,  
but I do the very thing I hate.

16 Now if I do what I do not want,  
I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

18 For 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.

19 For I do not do the good I want,  
but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want,  
it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law  
that when I want to do right,  
evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God,  
in my inner being,

23 but 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.

24 Wretched man that I am!  
Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!  
So then,

I myself serve the law of God with my mind,  
but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (ESV)

Review: The believer has died to the Law (7:1-6) when we try to live by the Law, sin turns our spiritual lives into death (7:7-12)  
Observations: 1) repetition of "I" 2) contrasts 3) parallels 4) timing—present tense  
Key Question: If the Christian is free from sin and the Law, but still struggles with sin—how does Romans 7 help us?

**Romans 7:13-25**

13 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.

The Law is good because it shows what it takes to access a holy God—holiness.

Sin is shown to be utterly sinful because it even uses what is good to cause sin.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual,  
but I am of the flesh,  
sold under sin.

7:25

Sin doesn't make sense even when we do it. Sin is not rational—but it is still sin.

15 For I do not understand my own actions.  
For I do not do what I want,  
but I do the very thing I hate.

Notice parallels—repetition for emphasis. The problem is real and serious.

16 Now if I do what I do not want,  
I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

Conflict between his desires and his ability because of the indwelling presence of sin

18 For 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.

Could this be said of an unbeliever as Paul has described them in chapters 1-3?

Contrast causing internal conflict

19 For I do not do the good I want,  
but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want,  
it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law  
that when I want to do right,  
evil lies close at hand.

Change from "the Law" of Moses to "a" or "another" Law—principle, truth

22 For I delight in the law of God,  
in my inner being,

A believer has the desire to do what is right—in their inner man—which is constantly confronted by sin

23 but 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.

This is a real battle.

Are Christians schizophrenic? Mind and body in opposition? No—but real conflict  
**Galatians 5:17-18** 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. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (ESV)

24 Wretched man that I am!  
Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then,  
I myself serve the law of God with my mind,  
but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (ESV)

When we are grateful we are able to see what God has done—for salvation and sanctification—so I say, thanks for Romans 8!

**Working Idea** (this is to help you see how the main idea was developed)

Since the grace of God through the cross of Christ has freed us from the sin and the Law, how do we deal with sin?

Romans 7 will show us that neither the Law nor our will is capable of overcoming sin's allure.  
Romans 7:13-25 will show us how great a struggle we are facing against sin.

**Main idea:**

We are dead to sin  
We are dead to the Law  
We don't have to yield to habitual sin

The Law is not at fault  
The Law-keeper is flawed

The Law (or any set of laws) cannot sanctify us.

**Teaching idea:**

The will (our will) cannot overcome the flesh and the sin to do what is right.

See below under introduction and at the beginning of the exposition to see additional teaching suggestions.

**Teachers:** This is a complex passage, so a word of encouragement and exhortation:  
We teach for the purpose of allowing the Spirit to apply the Word of God to the hearts of people.  
We teach for the purpose of transformation not information.

Therefore, we must seek to keep the main point, the main point.

This passage is notoriously complicated by the simple pronoun "I".  
At the end of the expositional notes, there is an 8 page appendix from a commentary by Thomas Schreiner that gives an in-depth review of the issue, giving a different perspective than the Moo *NIV Application Commentary*.

Because of the desire to keep the lesson as simple and practical as possible, I have included some material about the debated "I" but have not dealt with all the issues.

**Here is my basic understanding:**

Paul is referring to himself, using a personal illustration  
Paul is using himself as a prototypical Christian—we are like him

His question: "Is the Law sin?—NO", the Law reveals sin as sin and sin uses the Law (what it prohibits to entice)

Paul's main point is that the will of the Christian alone (that is, without the help of the Spirit—which we won't really hear about until chapter 8) cannot overcome sin through the effort of keeping the Law. We cannot blame the Law for sin. Even Christians who are dead to sin and not under Law will still struggle with sin. We must realize our own limitations and need.  
Does this excuse sin? NO!

## Introduction

*This section will help us answer the question:*

How do we do what is good?

or

How do we stop doing what is evil?

Having given the “theological teaching” about freedom from sin (chapter 6) it is natural that the believer would become frustrated because they seem to be imprisoned to continue in sin. The promise is that, we can live in a new realm, yet we may be frustrated by our continual meanderings into the realm of sin. Are we different from others? Are we the only ones who struggle? Do we just give up? Do we develop lists of do’s and don’ts?

The point that will be made is that the “struggle of a believer who is seeking to obey God and meet His standards of righteousness revealed in the Law in his own strength because he thinks that he can now obey out of his identification with Christ” is a tragedy because it is “hopelessly impossible.”<sup>1</sup>

So this passage can be either depressing—because we realize the incredible struggle we face.

*or*

It can be encouraging—because we realize the struggle with sin is something we can’t do on our own.

Therefore, I prefer to see this as another “know” passage. Chapter 6:1-14 emphasized the need to “know” that our position in Christ broke the bonds of sin. We don’t have to sin, and we need to know that. Chapter 7:13-25 teaches that we need to “know” that the battle to not sin and to do good is not something we can do ourselves. We will always lose.

But notice that this passage is directed to those who want to do what is right, are willing to do what is right, and are attempting to do what is right.

## Review

In 1:18–3:20 Paul demonstrated the universality of sin

3:10-18 served as summary of man’s desperately sinful condition

It points out man’s utter inability to be righteous

In 3:21–5:21 Paul explains the solution for sin

Paul taught about the believer’s victory over the guilt of sin. Justification through the blood of Christ has dealt with the guilt. In chapter 6-7 he begins to deal with the believer’s victory over the power of sin.

In 6:1–8:39 Paul demonstrates the God has provided the means of living godly lives

7:1-6 The believer has died to the Law

7:7-12 When we try to live by the Law sin turns our spiritual lives into death

7:13-25 Serve to summarize man’s utter inability to live righteously

“In the first twelve verse he shows that the believer is dead to the Law and, in fact, that the Law can only increase transgression because sin takes advantage of the believer’s desire to obey God and turns good intentions into constant failure. This is not because the Law is at fault; this is because the Law-keeper has a flaw. The Law is good and holy and righteous. The Law-keeper is fleshly, and the flesh is sold into slavery to sin. **Even though he has been identified with Christ the believer is helpless to obey God in himself after believing in Christ as he was before believing in Christ.** This is the point Paul makes in Romans 7:13-15 where he develops a picture, draws point and declares a principle.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William D. Lawrence, (Unpublished class notes, DTS, *Spiritual Life*) Lecture 9, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>William D. Lawrence, (Unpublished class notes, DTS, *Spiritual Life*) Lecture 9, p. 2.

## Section Preview

Pastor Bob Deffinbaugh overviews chapters 6-8 this way:<sup>3</sup>

The section we are studying in this lesson (Romans 6-8) contains three chapters. We can roughly summarize the section by chapters:

- The necessity of sanctification -- Romans 6
  - The necessity of personal righteousness -- Romans 6:1--7:6
    - ◆ Proof from our “baptism” -- Romans 6:3-14
    - ◆ Proof from slavery -- Romans 6:15-23
    - ◆ Proof from marriage and death -- Romans 7:1-6
- The impossibility of sanctification -- Romans 7
  - The source of our problem and -- Romans 7:7--8:30
- The certainty of sanctification -- Romans 8
  - God’s solutions
  - The appropriate response to these things -- Romans 8:31-39

## Passage Preview / Summary

Having established the reasons why we should not sin, Paul now turns to the issue of **how not to sin (7:1–8:17)**. **Negatively, neither our flesh nor the Law can do anything for us in this endeavor (7:1-25)**. Positively, we are sanctified through the ministry of the Spirit (8:1-17).

Chapter seven is notoriously difficult to interpret. Is Paul speaking here (using “I”) in an autobiographical sense? If so, is he speaking about his former life as an unbeliever or his present life as a Christian? (Can both chapters seven and eight be true of him at the same time?). Or is he speaking figuratively—either of believers in general or unbelievers in general?

In my understanding Paul is primarily dealing with the issue of how one deals with the problem of present sin—regardless of whether he is a believer or unbeliever. This is seen in the following way. The most consistent exegesis of this pericope sees the “I” as the same person throughout 7:7-25.<sup>4</sup> If so, then he is the unbeliever *before the Law was ever given* (v. 9: “once I was alive apart from the law”; cf. 5:13)—And therefore *not* a Jewish unbeliever. But he is also the unbelieving Jew: “We know that the Law is spiritual; I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (7:14). Further, Paul had just gotten done saying that believers are not under the Law (7:5). But he is also the believer (v. 25: “I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law”; v. 18: “I have the desire to do what is good”; cf. also vv. 21-22; *contra* 3:12).<sup>5</sup> In light of this evidence it seems that Paul is not arguing *chronologically* in 3:20–8:17 (as if to say, “after salvation, we will deal with sanctification”). Rather, he is dealing with two distinct, though intertwined issues: the imputation of righteousness and the impartation of righteousness. **Chapter seven is supremely, then, dealing with the issue of how one fights indwelling sin—and how one attempts to please God.** It has its application for all people who attempt to fight sin/please God by subjecting the flesh to external commands, as if this will accomplish anything.

The apostle begins chapter seven, however, with a reminder to believers: we are dead to the Law (7:1-6). Since this is so, we do not have to attempt to please God by knuckling under to its commands. But does this mean that the Law is bad? No, it is simply powerless over sin (7:7-13). The Law may be likened to a sterile spoon dipped into a glass of water with sediment on the bottom (which represents our flesh). When the spoon stirs up the sediment it does not *produce sin*; rather, it merely reveals it (7:13). But at the same time, it is powerless to clean out the sediment.<sup>6</sup>

As good as the Law is, the flesh is equally bad (7:14-25). And it, too, is powerless to obey the Law. **The point of 7:7-25 is that regardless of who attempts to fight sin—whether he is a believer or unbeliever—if his method is to subject the flesh to the Law he will fail. Focusing on the Law, an objective, cold standard, necessitates subjecting the flesh to it, because the Law is the handmaiden**

<sup>3</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, ©1996 by Community Bible Chapel, 210 Abrams Road, Richardson, TX 75081, <http://www.bible.org>. Lesson 4 (I’ve adapted and rearranged his outline)

<sup>4</sup> As judicious an exegete as C. E. B. Cranfield is, he stumbles at this point (as do most), by attempting to divorce 7:7-13 from 7:14-25—even though the first person singular is used throughout.

<sup>5</sup> The argument that is often used by those who maintain the autobiographical unbeliever view (i.e., Paul before his conversion) is that the present tense verbs are historical presents (so recently, Douglas Moo, *Romans* [Wycliffe], *loc. cit.*). But this view is virtually impossible for two reasons: (1) Paul would be the lone exception to his condemnation of mankind in that, as an unbeliever he desired to do good and was a slave to God’s law (7:18, 21-22, 25); and (2) *historical presents are always in the third person* (see my “John 5,2 and the Date of the Fourth Gospel,” *Biblica* 71 [1990] 177-205).

<sup>6</sup> Credit is due to S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., for this illustration.

of the flesh. But since believers are dead to the Law, they are able to gain victory over the flesh (7:6, 24-25).<sup>7</sup>

I include the previous quote to give a balanced perspective. But please note that the passage seems to be too specific for Paul to be discussing overcoming sin in general terms.

See appendix for the fullest treatment of the question of who the “I” is in Romans 7:13-25.

What follows is a brief but very practical interpretation of the problem of who Paul is dealing with, believer or unbeliever, and sin.

**(1) Paul changes from the past tense in verses 7-13 to the present tense in verses 14-25.** This change strongly suggests (as other evidence will confirm, at least to my satisfaction) that while Paul speaks of his experience as a non-Christian in verses 7-13, he is now speaking of his experience as a Christian in verses 14-25.

**(2) Note the progression in our text which presses on to the problem which is the source of the spiritual struggle of every Christian--the awesome power of sin.** Paul begins by stating that the problem is not with the Law of God but with his own flesh (verses 14-16). He then goes on to show that the real culprit is sin and not the flesh (verses 17-23). **Sin is evil; the flesh is weak.**

**(3) In our text, Paul is describing his own personal struggle with sin.** This is the most dramatic testimony of Paul’s struggle with sin. We have little difficulty believing that we struggle with sin or that others like Peter struggled, but Paul somehow seems above it all. This is a misconception, as our theology should remind us, and as Paul’s words instruct us. Paul’s struggle is a deeply personal struggle, with sin and with his own flesh. It is a war within. It is a war which results from his conversion, a war which did not exist until he was saved.

**(4) Paul is not able to understand or to precisely analyze his own struggle with sin.** We tend to think of Paul as the man with all the answers. If anyone can understand sin and our struggle with it, it would be Paul. But in our text Paul is the one struggling, and he does not offer a quick and easy explanation. This is because sin cannot be understood. **Sin is irrational. We try to rationalize our sinful actions to make it appear that we have reasons, good reasons, for our sin. But there is no good reason for sin. Sin is an irrational act which has no easy, rational explanation.**

**(5) Paul is not trying to supply us with the solution to his problem but simply describing the immensity of the problem of sin and the intensity of his struggle with it.** The solution to the Christian’s struggle with sin is explained in Romans 8. The struggle is described in Romans 7. While we are eager to hear God’s solution, we must first be convinced of the seriousness of the problem. Drastic situations require drastic measures. This situation is drastic, as are the measures God outlines in chapter 8.<sup>8</sup>

### Catch Phrase / Key Phrase:

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Romans 7:18)

### Outline

- I. **Doctrine: Justification—The Righteousness of God Revealed 1:18–11:36**  
*God’s Gracious Provision of Righteousness is Acquired by Faith in Jesus Christ*
  - A. **The Need of It 1:18–3:20 What a Mess!**  
*The Righteousness of God Revealed in Condemnation: The Universal Need of Righteousness*  
*The Bad News: All condemned for sin—no exceptions*
  - B. **What It Is 3:21–5:21**  
*What a God—The Way of Salvation*  
*Justification: The imputation of righteousness to all who believe*  
**“But now the righteous of God has been manifested” 3:21**

<sup>7</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Romans: Introduction, Argument, and Outline*, bible.org

Those who wish to have their cake and eat it, too—namely, by subjecting the believer to the Law though with the aid of the Spirit—seem to contradict the very strong statement in 7:6 (“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the Law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the letter”). Paul spends some time on this point because of the Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles be under the Law, too.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, ©1996 by Community Bible Chapel, 210 Abrams Road, Richardson, TX 75081, <http://www.bible.org>.

**C. How It Affects Me 6:1-8:39**

*Sanctification: The Impartation of Righteousness*

The Purpose of Salvation: Conformity to Christ's Image

	6:1 Principle	7:7 Practice	8:1 Power
Key Subject	Surrender	Self	Spirit

1. Believer and Sin 6:1-23
  - a. Believer's Freedom from Sin's Domination 6:1-14
  - b. Believer's Enslavement to God's Righteousness 6:15-23
2. Believer and the Law 7:1-25
  - a. Believer's Freedom from the Law 7:1-6  
*Freedom from the Law because the believer has died*
  - b. The Law's Relationship to sin and death 7:7-25  
*The Law being holy reveals the sinfulness of sin and in turn, sin and not the Law is the cause of death*
    - (1) Relationship between Sin and the Law 7:7-12  
Sin—seeks a base of operations  
*The Law being holy reveals the sinfulness of sin*
      - (a) Question: Is the Law sinful 7:7a
      - (b) Answer: By no means 7:7b-8
      - (c) Clarification: Biographical illustration 7:9-11
      - (d) Conclusion: the Law is holy, righteous and good 7:12
    - (2) The Great Conflict: Struggle for Victory 7:12-25  
*The Law being good is not the cause of death but sin is*

**Picture** We are helpless in our struggle with sin 7:13-15

**Point** Sin overcomes our good intentions 7:16-20

**Principle** When we try in our own effort, we experience failure and frustration in the flesh 7:21-25<sup>9</sup>

- (a) Question/statement: Sin, not the Law causes death 7:13  
It is sin that causes death and not the Law which reveals the true nature of sin
- (b) Reason: The Law is spiritual and man is carnal (flesh) 7:14-25a
  - i) Statement: Contrast of the Law and man 7:14
  - ii) Proof: Man's inability to have victory 7:15-20
    - a) Proof 1: Man is impotent to prevent doing what is wrong 7:15-17
    - b) Proof 2: Man is impotent to do what is right 7:18-20
  - iii) Results: Two laws conflict within man 7:21-25a
- (c) Summary: Man serves two laws 7:25b

<sup>9</sup> William D. Lawrence, (Unpublished class notes, DTS, *Spiritual Life*) Lecture 9, p. 3.

## Exposition / Key Exegetical Issues to be aware of



Think about it



Talk about it

**Teachers:** This is a complex passage, so a word of encouragement and exhortation:  
We teach for the purpose of allowing the Spirit to apply the Word of God to the hearts of people.  
We teach for the purpose of transformation not information.

Therefore, we must seek to keep the main point, the main point.

### What is the main point?

God has provided a wonderful salvation full of His grace, solely by faith—our life walk with Him must be lived in the same faith—utter dependence on Him. Until we understand our total dependence and our need to completely surrender our self-effort, we will not only battle sin, we will be sold back under the slavery of sin from which God so graciously saved us through the lavish gift of His Son.

So how do we fight indwelling sin? Romans 7 will teach—not by self effort by seeking to keep the Law.

### Potential Interactive: Respond—what are the strengths and weaknesses of this quote?

“Indeed, an honest and humble acknowledgment of the hopeless evil of our flesh, even after the new birth, is the first step to holiness. To speak quite plainly, some of us are not leading holy lives for the simple reason that we have too high an opinion of ourselves.”

John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), p. 74.

### Questions

Conflict in personality (DiSC) CD or iS as an example.

### Scenario

Due to the difficulty of this passage and the very important nature of the topic—one way of teaching this passage is through a “real life” scenario. Picture this scenario. Study the passage. Respond to the scenario.

A friend in your class has confided in you that they are struggling with lust/greed/bitterness (an ongoing struggle). How does Romans 7 help them? What would you do? What would you say?

How do you help them? Why do they struggle? What do they need to know?

7:1-25

*The believer’s relationship to the Law is that he is free from it and its domination.*<sup>10</sup>

What follows are four excerpts from an article by Wayne Stiles. He is senior pastor of Denton Community Church in Denton, Texas (<http://dcc-smots.org>). This provides a great overview and application—better than anything I could have written! You can read the full article online at [http://bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1154](http://bible.org/page.php?page_id=1154)

It is better understood another way. The placing of Romans 7 after Romans 6 is crucial for its interpretation and application. Romans 6 teaches that a believer is free from the power of sin, yet Romans 7 shows that the presence of sin seems to still be very much alive! If ch. 7 had come before ch. 6 we might then have concluded, as many have anyway, that ch. 7 is referring to the life of someone under the law and unsaved, struggling with a power that he is not free from (Romans 6 would then provide the answer). But since the order is as it is there must be another reason for the seeming inconsistency on Paul’s part, especially if he is referring to himself as the epitome of all believers. **The reason is this: just as the unbeliever could potentially earn salvation through his own efforts in ch. 3 (but he does not because he is a sinner), so the believer is said to be able to potentially “earn” sanctification through his own efforts in ch. 6 (but he does not, even though he is free from the power of sin).** Just as in ch. 1-4 Paul demonstrated that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, so in ch. 7 Paul shows the need for that same grace in sanctification, because while the believer is free from the power of sin (ch. 6), he still struggles with the presence of sin (ch. 7). God’s provisional grace is still necessary, not only for holy standing, but also for holy living, because man in his own power is powerless to gain either. Having described in Romans 6 the new identification the believer has in Jesus Christ, no longer being in Adam (the point of 5:12-21), Paul wrote, beginning in ch. 7, of the Christian’s relationship to the Law—essentially, that he is dead to it. **Yet simply being identified with Christ and dead to the Law, and even having a knowledge of such, does not give the believer victory in the Christian life. There still is an intense struggle within the believer which Paul illustrates personally in 7:15-25.** In fact, knowing what ch. 6— 7:14 teaches only serves to frustrate the believer, because he, in his own strength, cannot apply the liberating truth found therein.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Harold W. Hoehner’s outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

Romans 7 shows the painful struggle of the Christian. Martin Luther wrote, “I am a sinner, and I feel sin in me, for I have not yet put off the flesh, in which sin dwelleth so long as it liveth. . . . Let no man marvel therefore, or be dismayed, when he feeleth in his body this battle . . . .”<sup>11</sup> The Christian cannot live victoriously alone, and Paul describes why that is so, namely, that there are two laws which conflict within him. The conflict is real: **I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good** (v. 21). The principle is explained that there is, within the Christian who desires to do good, the flesh (cf. v. 18a) that desires to do evil. Herein lies the struggle in sanctification! The complete inability of the Christian to do what he, with all his heart and soul, desires to do! This must be a saved person’s struggle, as Cranfield notes:

The mind which recognizes, and is bound to, God’s law is the mind which is being renewed by God’s Spirit; and the inner man of which Paul speaks is the working of God’s Spirit within the Christian.<sup>12</sup>

Newell writes practically:

It is the unwillingness to own this different law, this settled state of enmity, toward God, in our own members, that so terribly bars spiritual blessing and advancement. As long as we think lightly of the fact of the presence with us of the fallen nature, (I speak of Christians) we are far from deliverance. . . . There is no strength or power in ourselves against the law of sin which is in our members. God has left us as much dependent on Christ’s work for our deliverance as for our forgiveness!<sup>13</sup>

Toussaint concurs:

In Romans 7:13-24 there is no mention of faith and consequently there is no reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course defeat is the consequence of such a situation. . . . the believer is called upon to be decisive and constant in drawing upon all of the resources of Christ in order to know God’s victory in his day-by-day walk. This is the message of Romans 7:13-25 by implication . . . .<sup>14</sup>

The implication to rely on God is declared clearly in Romans 8, but the purpose for Romans 7, again, as seen in its broad intended sanctification context, is showing the need for the Holy Spirit by showing the ultimate helplessness of the Christian to obey Christ in the power of the flesh. **The hopelessness of self-sanctification**, it’s solution in Christ, and the summary for the whole of ch. 7 is nowhere better epitomized than in vv. 24-25: **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 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.**

[This does not mean sin is unavoidable and that Christians should resign themselves to it.]

This resignation was Paul’s point in ch. 6, that Christians are no longer slaves to sin. But does this mean the Spirit will not allow conflict within the believer to show his need of Him? This is the point of ch. 7. Does not Galatians 5 teach that the Spirit not only allows such conflict but also is an active part in it? In a better understanding, Cranfield excels:

The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are. The assertion that this cry could only come from an unconverted heart, and that the apostle must be expressing not what he feels as he writes but the vividly remembered experience of the unconverted man, is, we believe, totally untrue. . . . The man, whose cry this is, is one who, knowing himself to be righteous by faith, desires from the depths of his being to respond to the claims which the gospel makes upon him. It is the very clarity of his understanding of the gospel and the very sincerity of his love to God, which make his pain at this continuing sinfulness so sharp. **But be it noted, v. 24, while it is a cry of real and deep anguish, is not at all a cry of despair.**<sup>15</sup>

Having already had this sin/death rendered powerless in ch. 6, ch. 7 shows the *inability to benefit* from this freedom within one’s own strength. Paul’s longing here not is a desire not for the *glorification* of ch. 8, but for the *empowerment* revealed in ch. 8, through the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to utilize the freedom acquired in ch. 6 and to quench the cry for freedom in v. 24. So, the freedom cried for is not just a *physical* freedom from the body of death, but a *practical* freedom from having to succumb to the law of sin within the body of death/sin that battles against the mind of the believer’s inner man. This is why, I believe, Paul makes the mind a poignant sanctification theme in 8 (vv. 6-7<sup>16</sup>). This inability of the fleshly mind to obey echoes the same theme of ch. 7. With this interpretation Bruce agrees: “. . . meanwhile [before glorification], when the longed-for deliverance has been obtained through the ‘law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ (8:2), it serves as a vehicle for the glorifying of God. . . .”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 504, 503

<sup>12</sup> Cranfield, 1:363

<sup>13</sup> Newell, 278

<sup>14</sup> Toussaint, 314

<sup>15</sup> Cranfield, 1:366

<sup>16</sup> “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able {to do so}.”

<sup>17</sup> Bruce, 147

## Conclusion and Application

This whole chapter so sadly smacks of American Christianity. Self-willed, self-directed arrogance that tries to pull oneself up by the bootstraps characterizes the so-called piety of our nation, as it did the nation Israel in the time of Paul and in the centuries beforehand. Today, even a faith that is so *liberating* (freedom from sin, freedom from the law, empowerment of the Spirit) can be completely *debilitating* if attempted to live on one's own strength. In Numbers 14, when the nation was terrified at the report of the spies, they refused to enter Canaan because of unbelief. Then, after a hearty rebuke of being told they would wander and die in the desert, they attempted to enter the land (i.e. fulfill God's purpose) without God! Moses made it so clear, "Do not go up, lest you be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you" (Num. 14:42). **When we attempt to fulfill God's purpose, apart from God's Holy Spirit, in our own strength, we will utterly fail.** Even after the emancipating truth of Romans 6:1-7:13, there is still an intense struggle with sin within the believer which Paul demonstrates in 7:15-25. Just as in ch. 1-4 Paul demonstrated that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, so in ch. 7 Paul shows the need for that same grace in sanctification, because while the believer is free from the power of sin (ch. 6), he still struggles with the presence of sin (ch. 7). God's provisional grace is shown to be still necessary, not only for holy standing, but also for holy living, because man in his own power is powerless to do either. "Most humbling of all confessions. Renewed, desiring to proceed—we cannot! We are dependent on the Holy Spirit as our only spiritual *power*, just as on Christ our only *righteousness*."<sup>18</sup>

A lesson to learn here, as teachers, would be not to teach the liberating truth of ch. 6:1-7:13 (freedom from sin and Law) without teaching the struggle of ch. 7:14-25 as normative for one who tries to live out the Christian life in his own strength, and without the empowering truth found in relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit, as explained in ch. 8. I believe a fair exposition may be given of ch. 6-7 even if one gives away the "answer" of ch. 8. After all, if sanctification is our goal, it is that "answer" we should always arrive at.

Thanks be to God! Who gave us Romans chapter eight!

### 7:13-25 The Great Conflict: Struggle for Victory

*The Law being good is not the cause of death but sin is*

**Picture** We are helpless in our struggle with sin 7:13-15

**Point** Sin overcomes our good intentions 7:16-20

**Principle** When we try in our own effort we experience failure and frustration in the flesh 7:21-25

7:13 Question/statement: Sin, not the Law causes death

*It is sin that causes death and not the Law which reveals the true nature of sin.*

7:14-25a Reason: The Law is spiritual and man is carnal (flesh)

The reason that the Law does not cause death is because it is spiritual whereas man is sold under sin which causes his defeat

7:14 Statement: Contrast of the *Law* and man

Man is sold under sin whereas the Law is spiritual

Flesh

His nature, by birth and by virtue of his union with Adam, is fallen. His fleshly nature is hostile toward God and friendly toward sin. Nothing good dwells in his flesh. His nature impairs not only his ability to comprehend the Law of God but inclines him to disobey it even if he did understand.<sup>19</sup>

"sold" is a perfect tense indicating the "present state of affairs" (some may say permanency) of the rule of sin

When we sin, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. We sin because we choose to do so.

However, as slaves of sin, we will not choose to do righteousness unless God intervenes. Apart from Him, we will continue to choose sin. Augustine said, in a statement later quoted by John Calvin, **"To will is of nature, but to will aright is of grace."**<sup>26</sup> In the same way, Luther argued that the unbeliever's willingness to sin "is something which he cannot in his own strength eliminate, restrain, or alter."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Newell, 274

<sup>19</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, ©1996 by Community Bible Chapel, <http://www.bible.org>.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.5.14.

<sup>27</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 102.

The will is in bondage to sin, and it will not be released except through the outside intervention of the Spirit of God. Luther stated, "Let all the 'free-will' in the world do all it can with all its strength; it will never give rise to a single instance of ability to avoid being hardened if God does not give the Spirit, or of meriting mercy if it is left to its own strength."<sup>28 20</sup>

**Point:** the sinful desires of the flesh will never change

7:15-20 Proof: Man's inability to have victory

Man's inability to have victory in that which is good only proves that man is sold under sin

Paul will say the same thing twice from two vantage points. One negative, "stop doing wrong" and the other positive, "start doing good."

7:15-17 Proof 1: Man is impotent to prevent doing what is wrong

The Law is not the problem, I am

➤Statement 7:15a

Our experiences confuse us: "I don't understand what I do"

The inability to "stop" or "do"

*Bodily illustration*

**Amputation**—Phantom Pain Romans 6

We still feel the pull of sin, but it doesn't have dominion over us. We don't have to obey.

**Paralysis**—Frustrating Inability Romans 7

Someone may have the will to move but does not have the ability to cause the action.

Notice three words for "do" or "practice" in 7:15b

*κατεργάζομαι (katergazomai)* "Intensity of our effort and shows us to be committed to obeying what God wants of us as revealed through the Law."

*πράσσω (prasso)* "emphasizes what we practice and shows our active pursuit of obeying God"

*ποιέω (poieo)* "emphasizes the product of our activity, a failure which we hate"

➤Proof: Not able to stop 7:15b-16

➤Conclusion: Control of Sin 7:17

Verses 14-16 make the first statement as Paul says something I do not think most of us do not believe. **The Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.** I think contemporary Christians would say just the opposite this verse were not staring them in the face. If you asked many would say, "I am spiritual, and the Law is carnal. I am spiritual and the Law is a matter of mere externals." That is not what Paul says. Paul says the problem is the Law's basic essence; it is spiritual and my basic essence is that there is no good that dwells within me. We are on two different wave lengths: First, I can not understand the Law, and second, even if I could understand it I would not do it because I am operating in the flesh, and there is no good that dwells in my flesh. My flesh resists the Law. It hates the Law.

In what sense then do we say the Law is spiritual? First we must say, (the Law of Moses), the Law is spiritual because it is God's Word. It is divine revelation, "**the oracles of God**"--it is God's revelation to men. Can we not say that the Law is Scripture? When we come to 2 Timothy 3: All Scripture is inspired, God breathed and profitable for teaching, etc., most people tend to say, "Yes, Pauline Epistles, New Testament, maybe the Gospels, but maybe some of the Old Testament." but in essence much of that Scripture which was in the hands of those who received

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>20</sup>Robert A. Pyne in Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003). 749.

that statement was law. The Law is Scripture, the Law is God-breathed, the Law is profitable. The Law speaks to men at the spiritual level. This is where the legalistic Sadducees and Pharisees missed the point. Because they were not spiritual, they could not understand the Law. Jesus kept saying to those who were the experts in the law, "Have you not read? Have you not understood? You are greatly mistaken. Why did he keep saying that to those who were the most expert in the Law? Because they did not understand that the law was spiritual, and they were not. Unspiritual men cannot understand spiritual law. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is saying the Law does far more than address mere externals. The Law addresses man's spirit.

So over and over again Jesus kept taking the Law to its innermost part, to its spiritual dimension, which went right over the head of those who were most expert in the Law. That is why we fail to read 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 where Paul is saying: "But just as it is written, 'BUT JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, THINGS WHICH EYE HATH NOT SEEN AND EAR HATH NOT HEARD AND HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN'--it is above us and beyond us--it is spiritual--beyond our dimension--these things God has prepared for those who love Him" For to us God revealed them through the Spirit for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. No man can understand God's revelation apart from the spirit of God--the law is spiritual; it therefore requires the spirit to interpret it to unspiritual men. We must have the Spirit of God to understand the spiritual dimensions of the Law. That is why David the Psalmist says, "Oh, how I love Thy law; it is my meditation day and night" because it did far more than say, "Do this," "Don't do that." That is why David said, "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things from Thy law." There was much more in the Law than simply the external commandments. There was that addressing of the heart. The Law is spiritual. I am of flesh."<sup>21</sup>

7:18-20 Proof 2: Man is impotent to do what is right.

Man is not the source of the problem, sin is.

➤Statement 7:18a

Deals with "how" to do good, 7:24 deals with "who" provides the help

Nothing good lives in me

Sin nature in control

➤Proof 7:18b-19

"I can will, but I cannot do, what is right" (Goodspeed)

Desire without ability

Though Christians are considered dead to sin, sin remains active, attractive, and seductive for Christians. We still feel the pull of sin like the opposite poles of two magnets attracting each other. Just as it takes physical power to keep the magnets apart, so it takes spiritual power—the Spirit's supernatural power—to keep us from yielding to temptation. If we fail to rely on the Spirit, sin becomes more than probable; sin becomes inevitable.<sup>22</sup>

Slavery to Sin offers no escape from personal responsibility. The self does not resist but readily submits to Sin's assaults. It is by the mind's own suppression of truth and the heart's willful disobedience that Sin establishes and maintains its mastery. The body readily gives itself—"yields its members"—to Sin's servitude (Rom 6:13; 7:23). Persons enslaved to Sin are nonetheless "held accountable to God" for their decisions and are "deserving of death" for their actions (Rom 1:32; 3:9, 19). As the ally of Sin (Rom 5:12–21), Death (see Life and Death) causes the disintegration of the self in flagrant violation of the magnificent unity in diversity which God created.<sup>23</sup>

➤Conclusion 7:20

"I sin when I try to keep the Law"

<sup>21</sup>Robert Deffinbaugh, ©1996 by Community Bible Chapel, <http://www.bible.org>.

<sup>22</sup>Henry W. Holloman in Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003). 976.

<sup>23</sup>Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993). 772.

7:21-25a Results: Two laws conflict within man

The result of man being sold under sin and that the Law is good, is the reality of the conflict between knowing and doing good.

Notice the contrast between Law (commandant) and “a law” “another law” “law of my mind” “law of sin” (7:21, 23,25)

Compare that with the occurrences of “sin” (singular–principle).

**Statement:** Reality of the Conflict 7:21

**Proof:** Description of the Conflict 7:22-23

The battle of the mind (1 Peter 1:13)

**Conclusion:** Victory over the conflict 7:24-25a

**Struggling to be holy by the Law or legalism, to make the flesh do what the Law requires, is futile.**

7:25b Summary: Man serves two laws

Although the believer can have victory over the conflict, he must realize that two laws (principles) that he is constantly serving/fighting

In the mind

In the flesh

“It is most important to recognize that Paul does not ever deny his own participation and responsibility in the midst of the conflict. He is responsible for the struggle with sin and he is responsible for the desire for righteousness. There is one “I” who is torn between two forces; there are not two “I’s,” two different personalities in the believer.”<sup>24</sup>

### Key Point / Summary

The point has been that the “struggle of a believer who is seeking to obey God and meet His standards of righteousness revealed in the Law in his own strength because he thinks that he can now obey out of his identification with Christ” is a tragedy because it is “hopelessly impossible.”<sup>25</sup>

So this passage can be either depressing: because we realize the incredible struggle we face  
*or*

It can be encouraging: because we realize the struggle with sin is something we can’t do on our own.

☞ Therefore, I prefer to see this as another “know” passage. Chapter 6:1-14 emphasized the need to “know” that our position in Christ broke the bonds of sin. We don’t have to sin, and we need to know that. Chapter 7:13-25 teaches that we need to “know” that the battle to not sin and to do good is not something we can do ourselves. We will always lose.

**But notice that this passage is directed to those who want to do what is right, are willing to do what is right and are attempting to do what is right.**

**Picture** We are helpless in our struggle with sin 7:13-15

**Point** Sin overcomes our good intentions 7:16-20

**Principle** When we try in our own effort, we experience failure and frustration in the flesh 7:21-25

We cannot overcome sin by our own effort.

We cannot blame the Law or any set of laws for our sin.

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<sup>24</sup>William D. Lawrence, (Unpublished class notes, DTS, *Spiritual Life*) Lecture 9, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup>William D. Lawrence, (Unpublished class notes, DTS, *Spiritual Life*) Lecture 9, p. 3.

We must acknowledge the limitation of our effort even when our will desires to do what is right.

We are left with the need to trust and surrender.



What do we learn  
About God?

We cannot live the way He wants us to without His help.



Act on it

Conversion does not instantly solve our problem of sin—only the condemnation from sin. The awareness of our inability to overcome sin by our own strength or by our own will, is a necessary step to God’s enablement.

We should have a sense of the seriousness of sin.

We must never diminish the seriousness of sin.

We must never be satisfied with our level of maturity and “sanctification.”

Be thankful when you sense the struggle—but don’t stay there, submit then to God.

There are two types of people in this world: Forgiven sinners and unforgiven sinners. And there are two types of forgiven sinners: Those who are fighting with sin and those who have surrendered to sin. Are you struggling with sin or is sin having victory over you?<sup>26</sup>

*The Scenario*

First we must invest time in our friend.

We should assure them of our friendship, not condemn them—but also let them know we will not leave them over this sin.

We should acknowledge that sin is sin and that we struggle also. (The reality is that we may not struggle with the same sin as our friend, but we struggle with sin.)

We should help them understand that the struggle is normal but not acceptable.

To overcome sin, we must understand our position in Christ (Romans 6)—we have freedom from the penalty/guilt of sin.

But we can never gain our freedom from sin’s power by self-effort or rule keeping.

Freedom from slavery to sin comes in acknowledging our inability to overcome it—by ourselves.

(As we move into Romans 8 we will learn that we must surrender to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.)

<sup>26</sup> Jeff Miller, Sermon Series on Romans, Senior Pastor at Trinity Bible Church in Richardson, Texas.

## Appendix: Romans 7:13-25 Christian Experience or Pre-Christian Experiences

Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998). 379-393.

I have already argued in the exegesis and exposition of verses 7–12 that the first person singular denotes Paul's experience. I would suggest that in verses 13–25 Paul's experience under the law is in view. Paul shifts in verses 14–25 to present tense verbs to depict his spiritual condition, which is captivity to the power of sin. The shift from the past to the present tense has often been set forth in defense of the view that the verses describe Christian experience (see below). But the passage does not intend to adjudicate between Christian and pre-Christian experience. It centers on the inherent inability of the law to transform. Verses 7–12 portray Paul's transgression and death upon encountering the commandment. Verses 13–25 underscore the continuing state of bondage under sin. 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.

In the history of interpretation debate has largely centered on whether Paul describes Christian or pre-Christian experience here. My comments above indicate that neither view is precisely on the mark. Since the debate on whether this is pre-Christian or Christian experience has been a long one, I will set forth the arguments on both sides,<sup>12</sup> which are remarkably strong.<sup>13</sup> After presenting the arguments for Christian experience, I will suggest that there is truth in both views.

I begin with the arguments supporting Christian experience.<sup>14</sup>

1. The shift to the present tense in 7:14–25 is most naturally explained by the supposition that in the previous verses Paul's pre-Christian experience was detailed, while in verses 14–25 he recounts his present experience.<sup>15</sup> The shift from past tense verbs to the present tense is not arbitrary but deliberate. In verses 7–13 nine past tense verbs are used; in verses 14–25 twenty-six present indicative first person verbs are used. The use of the present tense, therefore, is emphatic and sustained and seems best accounted for by the hypothesis that Paul now sets forth his current experience (Cranfield 1975: 344–45). To assert that the present tense was introduced for vividness (Kümmel 1974: 110) is possible but unpersuasive, for the past tense of verses 7–13 does not render the narrative there pale and lifeless.
2. If verses 14–25 related to pre-Christian experience, one would expect the text to conclude with the words "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25a). The defeat and slavery characteristic of the old life would thereby yield to the victory and joy inaugurated by the new life. The passage would reach its climax and conclusion with a note of triumph, indicating that the old life of failure and frustration is left behind. Nonetheless, the pericope does not conclude on the note of victory. Paul returns to the tension and ambiguity that permeate verses 14–24 after voicing the exclamation of thanksgiving. Verse 25b brings the passage to a close, ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοῦ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ, τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας (*ara oun autos egō tō men noi douleuō nomō theou, tē de sarki nomō hamartias*, therefore then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but the law of sin with the flesh). Reverting to the tension and ambivalence of human existence subsequent to the thanksgiving suggests that the deliverance available through Jesus Christ does not eliminate ongoing struggle with sin in Christian experience. Interestingly, some scholars have postulated that verse 25b is a gloss, reasoning that it must be interpolated

<sup>12</sup> Morrison and Woodhouse (1988: 9) believe that asking whether this is Christian or pre-Christian experience imposes "foreign categories" upon the text, but the thrust of their article suggests that the verses relate to pre-Christian experience. Russell's view (1994: 524–25) is rather similar. The reference is neither to believers nor to unbelievers but to "pious, believing Israelites."

<sup>13</sup> I am astonished that some interpreters seem to think the decision is relatively easy. For example, Fee (1994: 511) understands the evidence "overwhelmingly to favor" the pre-Christian view. For the history of interpretation see Kümmel 1974 passim; Wilckens 1980: 101–17.

<sup>14</sup> Modern scholars defending the view that Christian experience is intended include Nygren 1949: 284–303; Barrett 1991: 137–44; Murray 1959: 256–73; Packer 1964; Cranfield 1975: 341–47, 355–70; Dunn 1975; 1988a: 387–99, 403–12; Fung 1978; D. H. Campbell 1980; D. Wenham 1980; Dockery 1981; Espy 1985: 171–75; Morris 1988: 284–98; Laato 1991: 137–82; Garlington 1990b; Garlington 1994: 110–43; Mounce 1995: 167–68. Historically see, e.g., Luther 1972: 63–66; Calvin 1960: 146–55; Melancthon 1992: 158–62.

<sup>15</sup> Packer (1964: 623) argues that the present tense cannot be understood as a historical present here. Cf. also D. Wenham 1980: 86–87.

precisely because it destroys the climax of the text. Käsemann (1980: 211–12; cf. Bultmann 1947: 197–99; Bornkamm 1969: 99) even acknowledges that the text would refer to Christian experience if verse 25b were authentic. But any theory that verse 25b is a gloss should be vigorously rejected since there is no evidence in the manuscript tradition for the verse being suspect (Cranfield 1975: 368; Laato 1991: 160–61; Stuhlmacher 1994: 113). Moreover, it is difficult to believe that an interpolator would insert a gloss here and ruin the climax of the passage.

3. In the text there is a duality between the two “I”s. For instance, on the one hand, the assertion that “nothing good dwells in me” is limited by Paul’s explanatory comment about the “flesh” in verse 18. Thereby he intimates that the “I” struggling with sin cannot be restricted to the flesh; there is another dimension to the “I” that transcends the flesh (Cranfield 1975: 360–61; Laato 1991: 153–55). On the other hand, the “I” in verses 14–25 has nothing good within him insofar as the flesh is concerned, and yet the “flesh” does not exhaust the nature of the person portrayed in verses 14–25. The “I” that delights in God’s will does not commit sin; it is the “I” in which sin dwells as a power that accomplishes sinful actions (vv. 15–17, 19–20). The duality present in the text does not prove that verses 14–25 set forth Christian experience, but it does open the door to that possibility.
4. Building on the previous argument, one may adduce a significant piece of evidence supporting that Christian experience is in view. Pervading verses 14–25 is the desire (θέλω, *thelō*, vv. 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21) of the ἐγώ to keep God’s law. Such desire is not characteristic of unbelievers, for the mind-set of the flesh is at enmity with God (8:7). Indeed, 7:22 says that the ἐγώ rejoices (συνήδομαι, *synēdomai*) in God’s law. A deep joy and delight in the law of God signals that the ἐγώ is inhabited by the Holy Spirit (cf. Garlington 1990b: 218–21). Those who are in the flesh do not delight in God’s law; they hate God and do not keep his law (8:5–8). The very presence of a struggle sets this off from Paul’s unregenerate life (7:7–13; cf. Dunn 1975: 271–73; Garlington 1990b: 212–13). It is only the regenerate who “hate” what is evil and delight in the good, yet find themselves practicing evil (Nygren 1949: 290–91). Those who detect pre-Christian experience here object by saying that the pious Jew is intended. They claim that pious Jews delighted in God’s law and desired to keep it. These verses merely show that they lacked ability to put it into practice. Paul himself—advocates of the pre-Christian interpretation aver—was a pious Jew with a desire to keep the Mosaic law, and he speaks against his fellow Jews with similar aspirations in 2:1–29 and 9:30–10:8. But those who espouse Christian experience counter that Paul and other Jews did not really delight in God’s law but in establishing their own righteousness in a legalistic way. Such legalistic delight in the law is a far cry from the joy in God’s law reflected in 7:14–25.
5. The most significant objection to seeing verses 14–25 as depicting Christian experience is the depth of defeat to and bondage under sin related here. Those who think Christian experience is under consideration appeal to the already-but-not-yet theme in Pauline theology.<sup>16</sup> In 6:12–23 Paul warns believers that they must not resubmit to sin as a master, and 6:12 indicates that desires (ἐπιθυμία, *epithymia*) to sin still crop up in believers and must be resisted (Laato 1991: 144). Romans 8:9–27 clarifies that the hope that believers possess has not yet become a reality. Believers have already been liberated from the dominion of sin, but in the already–not yet situation there is still some bondage to sin until the day we die. The Pauline explanation of the role of sin in the lives of believers is not simplistic but complex. There is a sense in which we have been freed from the power of sin, and there is also a sense in which sin continues to have dominion over our lives. Romans 7:14–25 should not be taken in isolation from Rom. 6 and 8, nor should Rom. 6 and 8 be separated from 7:14–25 (so Cranfield 1975: 342, 357–58). All three chapters must be taken together in order to understand the nature of the Christian life (Garlington 1990b: 215–16).<sup>17</sup>
6. This already-but-not-yet conception is supported by some specific verses. For instance, the future verb ῥύσεται (*rhysetai*, he will deliver) in Rom. 7:24 is not accidental and should be taken seriously as a future. The deliverance for which God is thanked in verse 25 does not become a reality when one believes. It is experienced on the day of redemption when one is freed from the corruptible body.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation is strengthened when we note in verse 24 that one is

<sup>16</sup> On the significance of the already–not yet theme for verses 14–25, see Nygren 1949: 295–96; Dunn 1975: 264–73; Garlington 1990b.

<sup>17</sup> Mounce (1995: 167–68) says the experience depicted here is “cyclical.” Believers experience defeat and then depend on God for victory in the area where defeat triumphed. The believer gradually learns to depend more and more upon the Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> So Banks 1978: 39–40, who argues (pp. 35–39) that the closest parallel to Rom. 7:25a is 1 Cor. 15:57, where eschatological deliverance is contemplated.

delivered “from the body of this death” (ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου, *ek tou sōmatos tou thanatou toutou*).<sup>19</sup> Redemption from the physical body is not obtained when one first believes, nor as one progresses in the Christian life. The liberation is experienced at the *eschaton* when the body is raised from the dead.<sup>20</sup>

Romans 8:10–13 seems to confirm that 7:24 refers to a future redemption of the body, and that believers currently fight against a sinful body (cf. Dunn 1975: 264). Romans 8:10 portrays the tension in Christian experience: “The body is dead because of sin, while the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” What interests us here is the statement that “the body is dead because of sin” (τὸ μὲν σῶμα νεκρὸν διὰ ἁμαρτίαν, *to men sōma nekron dia hamartian*). Clearly, believers possess the Holy Spirit (8:8–9), yet the body is unredeemed and dying because of sin. The thought seems to be that believers are not yet liberated completely from the presence of sin.<sup>21</sup> As long as we possess corruptible bodies, sin and desires for sin will remain. The connection between the continuing presence of sin and life in the body is confirmed by 6:12 which links desires (ἐπιθυμία) with “the mortal body” (τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι, *tō thnētō hymōn sōmati*; cf. Laato 1991: 148–49). Believers therefore look forward to the day in which God “will give life to your mortal bodies” (ζῶσοιῆσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν, *zōsoiēsei kai ta thnēta sōmata hymōn*, 8:11). The parallel between 8:10–11 and 7:24 is striking, for in both texts the liberation from the present sinful body is in the future. Romans 8:11 clarifies that the future is the day of resurrection, and thus the suggestion is strengthened that believers will contend with sin until that day. Similarly, 8:13 promises believers that they will live “if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body” (εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε, *ei de pneumatī tas praxeis tou sōmatos thanatoute*). Again the connection between the tussle with sin and the corruptible body is forged. Believers must fight against the sinful body until the future day when life (ζήσεσθε, *zēsēsthe*) is granted. That the body is not redeemed until the *eschaton* is also confirmed by 8:23 (υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν, *huiōthesian apekdechomenoi tēn apolytrōsin tou sōmatos hēmōn*, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body). Believers have the firstfruits of the Spirit (8:23), but redemption is incomplete until the body is transformed on the day of liberation and the renewal of all creation. The already-but-not-yet tension, therefore, cannot be confined only to 7:14–25, but it is also a prominent theme in chapter 8. Chapter 8 itself communicates that Christian experience is ambiguous and a struggle since the sinful body still remains.

7. Scholars continue to debate whether Gal. 5:16–18 supports the idea that Christian experience is in view in Rom. 7:14–25. Laato (1991: 181–82) sees continuity between Rom. 7:14–25 and Gal. 5:16–18, for in the latter text believers by the power of the Holy Spirit can prevent sinful *actions* from occurring, but they are not freed from sinful *desires*. They still struggle against the “desire of the flesh” (ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκός, *epithymian sarkos*, v. 16; ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκός, *hē gar sarx epithymeī kata tou pneumatos, to de pneuma kata tēs sarkos*, for the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, v. 17). These desires witness to the continuing presence of sin in believers, for desires to practice evil are not eliminated until the day of redemption. It is the presence of these sinful desires that plagues Paul in Rom. 7:14–25 as well. What makes him feel wretched is not that he is actually stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and so on. The misery stems from the keen recognition that he is not free from evil desires and aspirations.
8. The last argument supporting a reference to Christian experience is not exegetical but existential. Most believers identify with the “I” who is unable to put into practice what is desired. Cranfield (1975: 347) is particularly eloquent in defending this view. He observes that as a person begins to grasp the call to holiness, “the more conscious he becomes of his own continuing sinfulness, his stubborn all-pervasive egotism.” Moreover, “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” (Cranfield 1975: 358).

<sup>19</sup> The assertion by Lloyd-Jones (1974: 253) and Moo (1991: 495) that a Christian would not ask “who” would be the deliverer misses the point, for it fails to see the rhetorical setup in the question.

<sup>20</sup> Laato (1991: 151–52) observes that the verb ῥύεσθαι is linked with the second coming of Christ in Rom. 11:26 and 1 Thess. 1:10.

<sup>21</sup> D. Wenham (1980: 85–86) and Laato (1991: 145–49) set forth evidence that suggests that Rom. 8:10 and 8:23 teach “that the body will die because it is a continuing ally or centre of sin in your life” (D. Wenham 1980: 86), and not merely that death will eventuate because believers have sinned. Cf. also Cranfield 1975: 389.

Despite the impressive reasons adduced for the view that Christian experience is in Paul's sights here, equally impressive evidence is adduced supporting the view that pre-Christian experience is portrayed.<sup>22</sup> According to this view, Paul as a believer casts a backward glance at the reality of life under the flesh.<sup>23</sup>

1. The structure of the text supports pre-Christian experience in two ways. First, Rom. 7:5 says that the passions of sin were provoked through the law and resulted in death, while 7:6 says that we have been released from the law so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit. Romans 7:7–25 describes further the situation portrayed in 7:5, in which sin and death dominate the person who is under the law (cf. Schnackenburg 1975: 297). Continuity is established between those who “were in the flesh” in 7:5 and the confession of the “I” that it is “fleshly” in 7:14 (cf. 8:9; Theissen 1987: 183). Romans 8:1–17 aptly portrays the situation of the person who is liberated from the dominion of the law, with the result that he or she has the power to keep God's commandments, while in 7:14–25 the “I” is unable to do what is commanded (so, e.g., Seifrid 1992: 232). Thus the structure of this section can be portrayed as follows:

- A Life under the law: Unregenerate experience described (7:5)
- B Life in the Spirit: Regenerate experience described (7:6)
- A' Life under the law elaborated (7:7–25)
- B' Life in the Spirit elaborated (8:1–17)

The simplest way of understanding the structure suggests that Paul is describing the experience of unbelievers in verses 14–25, for 7:7–25 elaborates on 7:5, which clearly portrays unregenerate experience, and 8:1–17 unpacks 7:6, which relays the liberating work of the Spirit.

The second structural argument has to do with the relationship between verses 13 and 14. Verse 13 asserts that sin, not the law, is responsible for a person's death. The *γάρ* (*gar*, for) introducing verse 14 functions as the ground explaining how sin rather than the law is responsible for the death of human beings (Kümmel 1974: 58; Gundry 1980: 236). 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. In addition, 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. 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.

Nor does the conclusion articulated in verse 25b undermine the thesis being defended here. The arguments given above against verse 25b being a gloss are compelling. But the pre-Christian interpretation scarcely demands that the passage concludes on a note of triumph and victory. The presence of the conclusion in verse 25b is adequately accounted for when we realize that Paul wanted to return to the main thesis of the text (the power of sin over those under the law) in drawing this passage to a close. Verse 25b, then, functions as a conclusion to the main theme of verses 14–25: Paul had a desire to keep the law but was unable to put it into practice (cf. Gundry 1980: 240). 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.

2. Those who see verses 14–25 as depicting Christian experience appeal to the present tense verbs as significant evidence supporting their view. It is probably inadequate to respond that the present tense simply conveys vividness. But the use of the present tense is hardly a decisive argument

<sup>22</sup> In support of this view see, e.g., Kümmel 1974: 57–73, 97–138; Althaus 1951: 31–49; Althaus 1952; D. Davies 1953; Bultmann 1960: 147–57; Bornkamm 1969: 87–104; Kertelge 1971; Ridderbos 1975: 126–30; Hoekema 1975: 61–67; Schnackenburg 1975; Wilckens 1980: 85–97; Beker 1980: 237–43; Käsemann 1980: 198–212; Gundry 1980; B. Martin 1981; Theissen 1987: 182–84; Ziesler 1989: 191–95 (cautiously); P. Meyer 1990; Moo 1991: 468–96; Lambrecht 1992: 87–89; Fitzmyer 1993c: 465; Fee 1994: 511–15; Stuhlmacher 1994: 114–16; Byrne 1996: 226 (although he then proceeds to say that the text transcends these categories).

<sup>23</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1974: 238–57) argues that neither the regenerate nor the unregenerate are described here, maintaining that the text portrays the process of one who is being converted. It is doubtful that Paul describes the process of conversion here, for the text analyzes human ability in terms of the Law, and not the psychological process by which one comes to new life.

for the theory that Christian experience is contemplated. Present tense verbs do not necessarily indicate “present” time. Indeed, recent research questions whether the present tense has any significant relationship to time (S. Porter 1989; S. Porter 1994: 20–49). In any case, one needs to account for the shift from imperfect and aorist verbs to the consistent use of the present tense in these verses. The most satisfactory answer is that the present tense stresses the condition or state of the person enslaved to sin (Seifrid 1992: 234).<sup>24</sup> In verses 7–11 Paul uses the imperfect tense because he relays in narrative form his experience, while in verses 14–25 he adopts the present tense because his nature or state under the law is unfolded. The state of the person who is a slave to sin is communicated most effectively through present tense verbs.<sup>25</sup>

3. The attempt to justify a reference to Christian experience by the duality of the “I” in verses 14–25 is unpersuasive (Wilckens 1980: 87–88). No strict separation between the two “I”s can be maintained. It is the whole “I,” after all, that is in bondage to sin. Nor does it work to say that there is a suggestion that there is more to the “I” portrayed in verses 14–25 than the “flesh.” This is precisely what Paul does *not* say, for he never says a thing about the presence of the Spirit, and such a mention would clearly suggest a regenerate person. Thus the comment about the “flesh” simply specifies the nature of the “I.”
4. 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. The emphatic  $\nu\nu\nu$  (*нын*, now) in 8:1 should be noted (Kümmel 1974: 69–70). The  $\nu\nu\nu$  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  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  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.
5. Nowhere do verses 14–25 mention the Holy Spirit, whereas chapter 8 refers to the Holy Spirit nineteen times (cf. Kümmel 1974: 105; Althaus 1951: 36–37). 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, for this person has received the ability to obey the commandments of the law through the indwelling Spirit. According to 8:1–13 those who are of the “flesh” are unable to keep God’s law, while those who have the Holy Spirit are able to fulfill the law by the Holy Spirit’s power. These verses in chapter 8 function as a corollary and response to 7:14–25. The fleshly person in 8:5–8 who cannot keep the law is parallel to the person in 7:14–25 who is in bondage to sin, and Rom. 8 clarifies that the person of the flesh is unregenerate. By contrast, those in 8:1–13 who fulfill the law possess the Holy Spirit and thereby have the resources to put God’s law into practice.
6. How can the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  be a nonbeliever when an ardent desire to keep the commands of the law is present? Indeed, the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  “delights in the law of God” (v. 22), and advocates of the view that the reference is to the regenerate contend that such delight is impossible for unbelievers. Those who detect unregenerate experience here respond by saying that the struggle with sin in verses 14–25 is typical of a pious Jew or moral person (cf. Althaus 1951: 41–42; Ridderbos 1975: 128–30; Gundry 1980: 235; Moo 1991: 476). 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 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

<sup>24</sup> Seifrid (1992: 232–36; cf. also Dahl 1977: 93; Thielman 1989: 106–7) maintains that the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  here is modeled on the penitential prayers and confessions of Jewish literature that relate the past sins and present state of the person involved (cf. Ezra 9:5–15; Isa. 63:5–12; Jer. 3:22–25; Dan. 3:24–45 LXX; Tob. 3:1–6; Bar. 1:15–3:8; Pr. Man. 1–15; Jos. As. 12.1–13.15; 1QH 9[1].21–27; 11[3].19–29; 12[4].33–35; 1QS 1.24–26; 11.9–10).

<sup>25</sup> Gundry (1980: 228–29) adds to this point by observing that in Phil. 3:4–6, where Paul obviously speaks of his past life, present tense verbs are implied. It would follow, then, that present tense verbs could easily denote a time period before Paul was a Christian. I do not find this appeal to Phil. 3:4–6 to be particularly convincing. Some of the items in the list would have to be rendered as a present tense by virtue of the expression used, e.g., “I (am) an eight-dayer with reference to circumcision,” or “I am of the nation of Israel” or “I am of the tribe of Benjamin.” But other items on the list must have an implied past tense, for Paul no longer persecuted the church, and he would probably no longer label himself as a Pharisee. Note the past tense of  $\eta\nu$  in Phil. 3:7.

piously and was notable among his contemporaries for his zeal (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:4–6).<sup>26</sup> 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. It is also asserted that the phrase “the inner person” (τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, *ton esō anthrōpon*, v. 22) signals Christian experience since elsewhere in Paul it denotes the inner person with respect to believers (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16; cf. Dunn 1975: 262; Cranfield 1975: 363; Garlington 1990b: 221–23; Laato 1991: 162). Such an assertion is questionable, for this anthropological designation could be used of unbelievers as well (so Gundry 1976: 135–40; D. Wenham 1980: 84; Moo 1991: 489–90).

7. 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.” Paul is careful to say that he is “not under law,” even though he subjects himself to the law, in order to win “those under law” (1 Cor. 9:20). Those who rely on the works of the law “are under a curse” (Gal. 3:10). Scripture has shut up all “under sin” (Gal. 3:22). Before faith in Christ arrived, all people were “under the pedagogue” (Gal. 3:23, 25). Before the age of maturity, people are “under guardians and managers” (Gal. 4:2). This is another way of saying they were enslaved “under the elements of the world” (Gal. 4:3). Jesus was born “under the law” in order to liberate “those under law” (Gal. 4:4–5). The Galatians are indicted because they want to be “under law” (Gal. 4:21), and those who are led by the Spirit are “not under law” (Gal. 5:18). 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>27</sup>
8. Those who restrict the text to believers have the problem of explaining the bleakness of the alleged Christian experience portrayed in these verses (so, e.g., Ridderbos 1975: 127; Wilckens 1980: 86; Moo 1991: 475; Seifrid 1992: 232, 236–37, 241). The depth of defeat seems to contradict Rom. 6, which asserts that Christians are dead to sin and no longer slaves to sin (e.g., Kümmel 1974: 98). According to Rom. 6 the tyranny of sin has been broken for believers so that they are now free to serve righteousness, and 8:2 says that “the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Given these statements, how could Paul say of a Christian that he or she is “fleshly ... sold under sin” (σάρκινος ... πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, *sarkinos ... pepramenos hypo tēn hamartian*, v. 14)? Similarly, in 7:23 the “I” is said to be “taken captive” (αἰχμαλωτίζοντα, *aichmalōtizonta*) to the “law of sin that is in my members.” Again, the picture communicated by captivity is one of complete bondage, in which the “I” has no ability to escape from the captors. Indeed, the theme that informs all of verses 14–25 is the inability to keep God’s commandments, even though the desire to put them into practice is present. These descriptions of the “I” seem to contradict what is said about believers in Rom. 6 and 8. According to 8:9 believers are not σάρκινος but spiritual, for no one belongs to God at all without possessing the Holy Spirit. Romans 7:14–25 portrays a person who cannot keep God’s commands and who has failure as the center and circumference of his or her experience, whereas the person described in chapter 8 keeps God’s law by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Rom. 7 the person is unable to put God’s law in practice, while in Rom. 8 strength to fulfill commands is granted by the Holy Spirit. In conclusion, these verses relate to unbelievers, since they lack the power to keep God’s commandments.

The arguments on both sides are remarkably strong, with some arguments of course being stronger than others. I would suggest that the arguments are so finely balanced because Paul does not intend to distinguish believers from unbelievers in this text (see esp. Seifrid 1992: 226–44). Paul reflects on whether the law has the ability to transform human beings, concluding that it does not. The law puts to death unbelievers who desire to keep it, since they lack the power to keep it. They are in bondage to sin and captives to sin, and when they encounter the law, death ensues. On the other hand, believers are not absolutely excluded from this text either. It would be a mistake to read the whole of Christian experience from this account, for, as chapter 8 shows, believers by the power of the Spirit are enabled to keep God’s

<sup>26</sup> Some proponents of the pre-Christian experience interpretation insist that verses 14–25 could hardly refer to Paul’s pre-Christian experience since Gal. 1:13–14 and Phil. 3:4–6 indicate that he had no struggles of conscience previous to his conversion. They believe Paul possessed a robust conscience and was unaware of any defects in his life.

<sup>27</sup> Of course, Jesus in Gal. 4:4 is the exception that proves the rule, for he inaugurates the new age of salvation by taking upon himself the curse of the old age (Gal. 3:13).

law. And yet since believers have not yet experienced the consummation of their redemption, they are keenly aware of their inherent inability to keep God's law. When believers contemplate their own capacities, it is clear that they do not have the resources to do what God demands. In encountering God's demands, we are still conscious of our wretchedness and inherent inability. The struggle with sin continues for believers because we live in the tension between the already and the not yet. The specific texts adduced above (6:12; 8:10–13, 23) demonstrate that there is tension between inaugurated and consummated eschatology in believers. Complete deliverance from sin is not available for Christians until the day of redemption. Christians, precisely because they have not yet experienced full liberation from sin, are conscious of the continuing presence of sin in their lives. We should not conclude, however, that believers are utterly helpless under the power of sin, for this would leave out Rom. 6 and 8. All believers are frustrated by their failure to keep God's law and long for the day when redemption will be completed and perfection will be theirs. The future tense of *ῥύσεται* (*rhysetai*, he will rescue) in Rom. 7:24 indicates that rescue from sin will be completed only on the last day (cf. 8:23), but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that deliverance at the last day only is contemplated. The genius of Paul's eschatology is that the future has invaded the present. Thus the certainty that believers will conquer death has implications for the present. I will argue that Rom. 8:1 says that there is *now* no condemnation for believers because of their *future* (drawing the inference from 7:24) deliverance from death (see exegesis and exposition of 8:1–4). Once again, I agree with those who detect a future deliverance from sin in 7:24, but this should not exclude present victory as well.

Galatians 5:16–18 also reveals that Christians still battle the desires of the flesh. This is apparent from Rom. 6:12 and 8:13 as well. Since believers still sin, it is not surprising that they are liable to the same sinful desires that dominate unbelievers. We can properly conclude from Gal. 5:16–18 that salvation is not yet complete for believers and that they still fight against sin. Nonetheless, in Gal. 5:16–18 the dominant chord is victory over sin by the power of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup> Believers experience substantial, significant, and observable victory over sin, and yet perfection is not theirs.<sup>29</sup>

Some scholars who think that Christian experience is described here believe that Paul describes substandard Christian experience that one should transcend as one matures spiritually (e.g., Fung 1978; D. Wenham 1980). The attempts to limit this to substandard Christian experience are unsatisfying. The purpose of the text is to delineate the inability of the Torah to transform human existence. Paul is not drawing a psychological portrait in which believers who are defeated by sin find the secret to victory over it. His point is that the flesh (native human capacities) has no ability to observe God's commandments. Stott (1994: 209–10) thinks the reference is to OT believers who did not yet possess the Spirit but loved God's law. These OT believers experienced perpetual defeat since the Spirit did not indwell them but only anointed them with power for specific tasks and ministries. Stott goes on to argue that some believers also live under the confines of 7:14–25 since their religion is legalistic and rule-based instead of being liberated by the power of the Spirit. Stott's view is unpersuasive, for Paul does not criticize legalism here but inability to keep the law. Nor is the reference here to individual believers during the OT period.

#### Additional Notes

**7:14.** The variant οἶδα μὲν is attested in a few manuscripts. Such a reading is surely possible since the earliest manuscripts did not have a space between words. Scribes who separated the two words were presumably influenced by the first person singular forms that dominate the subsequent verses. The reading οἶδαμεν is preferable since verse 14a is a confessional statement about the law, which is followed by the intensely personal experience depicted in verses 14–25.

<sup>28</sup> Gundry (1980: 237) claims that Rom. 7:14–25 cannot relate to Christian experience since the text describes sinful actions (see the verbs *κατεργάζεσθαι* [katergazesthai, to effect, vv. 13, 15, 17, 18, 20], *ποιεῖν* [poiein, to do, vv. 15, 16, 19, 20, 21], *πράσσειν* [prassein, to practice, vv. 15, 19]). His exegesis here is ultimately unconvincing, for the sins referred to here are not merely confined to outward actions but also to sinful desires, viz., coveting. In verses 7–11 Paul is not merely decrying sinful actions like murder and adultery. He also laments the sinful desires that percolate in the heart (cf. Laato 1991: 157–59). To have such sinful desires is to commit sin. Thus it is not at all unusual that the verbs *κατεργάζεσθαι*, *ποιεῖν*, and *πράσσειν* would be employed in reference to sins of the heart. Laato (1991: 159) says rightly that no person has ever only done evil when desiring to perform what is good. The persistent struggle relayed here is sensible only if Paul is speaking of the inability to maintain pure motives, so that despite earnest intent the Law is not kept.

<sup>29</sup> Others assert that *αὐτὸς ἐγώ* (*autos egō*, I myself) in Rom. 7:25 should be translated “I of myself,” denoting human ability apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus the text may refer to both believers and unbelievers (cf. Mitton 1953–54; R. Longenecker 1964: 96–97). Mitton's view that *αὐτὸς ἐγώ* refers to self-effort apart from the Spirit has not been vindicated by further scholarship (e.g., Packer 1964: 267; Fung 1978: 39–40). Despite disagreeing with Mitton's exegesis of Rom. 7:25 and the theology he extracts from it, I concede that he is right in seeing a reference to both believers and unbelievers.

**7:14.** The Majority text and  $\kappa^2$  read *σάρκικος* instead of *σάρκινος*. The latter reading is preferable inasmuch as it is supported by Alexandrian and Western texts. In addition, *σάρκικος* is used six times in Paul, while *σάρκινος* is attested in only two other places (1 Cor. 3:1; 2 Cor. 3:3). In any case, a different meaning should not be ascribed to the two words (cf. Parsons 1988: 151–52). The alteration from *σάρκινος* in 1 Cor. 3:1 to *σάρκικος* in 3:3 suggests that the terms are synonymous.

**7:14–25.** The argument from experience convinces many Christians that Rom. 7:14–25 portrays Christian experience. An appeal to experience should not be denied since we can gain greater understanding of biblical texts by seeing how they are applied in everyday life. Kümmel (1974: 107–8) is less than persuasive when he concedes that the experience depicted here is true of most believers, and then resorts to the solution that our Christianity is different from Paul's because it lacks an eschatological character. Those of us who believe that the Scriptures function as an authority in terms of faith and practice are convinced that the Scriptures fit with everyday life. Believers do struggle with sin and are defeated by it. What Paul has written in Rom. 6:12–14, 8:10–13, and other texts (Phil. 3:12–16) indicates that believers still battle with sin. His two letters to the Corinthians alone should convince us that believers still sin this side of redemption. Nonetheless, at the end of the day the emphasis in the Christian life is on substantial, significant, and observable victory over sin. Believers are so conscious of their shortcomings that many place themselves only in Rom. 7:14–25, but no believer is subject to total defeat and bondage. Complete subservience to the power of sin is not the experience of any Christian, for the power of the Holy Spirit lifts believers out of the dominion of sin and death.

Some scholars who support the pre-Christian interpretation argue that Paul was not troubled by his continuing sinfulness as a Christian (cf. Kümmel 1974: 101–3; Althaus 1951: 96–101; Stendahl 1976: 40–52, 90–91) since Paul defends vigorously his integrity and blamelessness as an apostle of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:1–27; 2 Cor. 1:12–2:2; 10:1–13:14; 1 Thess. 2:1–12), calls on others to imitate him (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17), and remarks that he is not conscious of doing anything wrong (1 Cor. 4:4). These arguments are unconvincing (see esp. Espy 1985; Laato 1991: 176–82). Texts such as 1 Cor. 4:4 and 2 Cor. 10–13 should not be taken as blanket statements of sinlessness. The context of these passages (so also 1 Cor. 9:1–27; 2 Cor. 1:12–2:2; 1 Thess. 2:1–12) is Paul's apostolic office; he insists that he is without blame insofar as his ministry is concerned. This is not to say that his public ministry is unrelated to his private behavior; the point is that he has restrained the desires of the flesh sufficiently, so that they have not resulted in external actions that would bring disrepute upon his ministry. But 1 Cor. 9:27 suggests that Paul still struggles against sinful desires, because he has to subject his body in order to prevent those desires from being actualized. Moreover, Phil. 3:12–16 indicates that Paul is keenly aware of his continuing imperfection. Kümmel's (1974: 101–2) view that the text relates only to religious imperfection is unpersuasive, for in Pauline theology one cannot separate moral and religious imperfection. The two are inextricably intertwined. Thus Kümmel can maintain his view only by imposing a false dichotomy on the text. The most natural way of reading Phil. 3:12–16 is to conclude that Paul was conscious of his continuing sinfulness and expected to be liberated from it at the resurrection.

## **Romans 7:13-25**

13 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.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual,  
but I am of the flesh,  
sold under sin.

15 For I do not understand my own actions.  
For I do not do what I want,  
but I do the very thing I hate.

16 Now if I do what I do not want,  
I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

18 For 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.

19 For I do not do the good I want,  
but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want,  
it is no longer I who do it,  
but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law  
that when I want to do right,  
evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God,  
in my inner being,

23 but 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.

24 Wretched man that I am!

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then,

I myself serve the law of God with my mind,  
but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (ESV)