

“Romans 7:7-25 and The Doctrine of Sanctification”

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## Introduction

It perhaps cannot be overstated that Romans 7 is one of the most discussed, and difficult, passages in the New Testament. It is pivotal to Paul's theology, and to the studies of anthropology (man), hamartiology (sin), and soteriology (salvation). Whatever view is adopted will impact one's theology (i.e., progressive sanctification, indwelling sin, relationship with the Mosaic Law) and Christian living (e.g., repentance or response to personal sin). Much ink has been spilt on Rom 7 throughout church history. Views and interpretations abound; simply put, "one side sees too much bondage to sin for a Christian, and the other sees too much desire for the good for a sinner."<sup>1</sup> Still others decry the neglect of the Mosaic Law, which is central to the chapter as well as Paul's theology.

This essay seeks to summarize and evaluate the major interpretations of Romans 7:7-25, and draw theological implications. Before continuing further, please take time to carefully read Rom 7:1-25 and understand its historical literary context—slow down! Read and reread the text. Make as many observations from the text as possible. Memorize the flow of the text. This article presumes that the reader has intimate familiarity with the text.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Moody, *Romans*, The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 207 quoted in David Dockery, "Romans 7:14-25: Pauline Tension in the Christian Life." *Grace Theological Journal* 2.2 (Fall 1981): 240.

## Context

### Paul's Biography

It would be helpful to first briefly review the literary and historical context of the text. The Apostle Paul wrote the Book of Romans during his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:22-23; 19:21). He was born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11), which was a prosperous city, a center of Greek learning and culture. His father was a Roman citizen, which gave him Roman citizenship (cf. Acts 22:28). He was called two names: Saul, most likely after the first king of Israel, and Paul (cf. Acts 13:9). Phil 3:5-6 further describes his heritage and life: “circumcised the eighth day [cf. Gen. 17:10ff; Lev. 12:3], of the nation of Israel [cf. Ex. 3:10], of the tribe of Benjamin [cf. 1 Sam. 9:1-2], a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee [Acts 23:6; 26:5]; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church [Acts 8:3; 9:1-2]; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” According to rabbinical tradition, after age 13 (recognized as an adult), he would have been sent off to Jerusalem to intensely study and memorize Scripture. At the end of his training he became a Pharisee—an expert and exemplar in the Mosaic Law. Christ appeared to him in a vision while on the road to Damascus, gets saved, and is commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1ff, 15, 17).

### Overview of the Book of Romans

Paul wanted to visit Rome to edify the believers residing there (Rom 1:11), to preach the gospel (1:15), and to get to know the Roman Christians so that they could encourage him (1:12, 15:32), pray for him (15:30), and support his ministry goals in Spain (15:28). In his letter, he provides a theological treatise so that they would have no question about his doctrine. The following provides a general outline of the Book:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Brad Klassen, “Romans,” BI701 Ordination Preparation, Lecture Notes, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, Fall 2015.

- I. Introduction and Purpose (1:1-17)
  - A. Theme (1:16-17)
- II. Condemnation: The Need of God's Righteousness (1:18-3:20)
  - A. Gentile Condemnation (1:18-32)
  - B. Jewish Condemnation (2:1-3:8)
  - C. Universal Condemnation (3:9-20)
- III. Justification: The Provision of God's Righteousness (3:21-5:21)
  - A. The Summary of Justification (3:21-31)
  - B. The Illustrations of Justification (4:1-25)
  - C. The Blessings of Justification (5:1-11)
  - D. The Imputation of Justification (5:12-21)
- IV. Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness (6:1-8:39)
  - A. Old and New Life (6:1-23)
  - B. The Battle with Sin (7:1-25)
  - C. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)
- V. Restoration: Israel's Future in God's Righteousness (9:1-11:36)
  - A. Israel's Past: Sovereign Election (9:1-33)
  - B. Israel's Present: Willful Rejection (10:1-21)
  - C. Israel's Future: Glorious Restoration (11:1-36)
- VI. Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1-15:13)
  - A. Responsibilities toward God and Society (12:1-21)
  - B. Responsibilities toward Government and Neighbors (13:1-14)
  - C. Principles of Christian Liberty (14:1-23)
  - D. Practices of Christian Liberty (15:1-13)
- VII. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)

### Major Interpretive Views<sup>3</sup>

There are numerous interpretive challenges in Rom 7: How does the chapter fit with the rest of the epistle? What is the function of the illustration of marriage (7:1-6)? What is the “law” that Paul refers to (23x in Rom 7)?<sup>4</sup> Is Paul speaking about his own experience? If so, at what point in his life is he describing (e.g., before or after conversion)? When was the “law” not “present” in general or in Paul’s life? What does it mean to be alive apart from the law or to die when the law came? What is the “flesh?” Is Rom 7 about the struggle (e.g., with the Mosaic Law, with sin) of an unregenerate person, the regeneration of an unregenerate person, or exclusively the experience of a regenerate person? If this is about a regenerate person, are there two natures in one regenerate person? The issues abound.<sup>5</sup> Space (and sanity) limits this essay from being able to answer all the interpretive challenges of Rom 7. This essay focuses on two dominant questions relating to Rom 7:7-25: (1) Whom is “I” referring to, and (2) is “I” a true believer?

With varying opinions on details, the major interpretive views can be summarized into the following:

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Hart asserts that all views of Rom 7 can be grouped in one of three ways: (1) the believer’s experience (e.g., Paul at maturity, pious Israelites); (2) the unbeliever’s experience (Paul primarily in Rom 7:7-13, every human in Adam, historical Israel under law); and (3) both believers and unbelievers [“Paul as Weak in Faith in Romans 7:7-25.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (July-September 2012): 316-17]. See footnotes for respective proponents of each view. Michael Vlach summarizes the major views accordingly: (1) The experience of the Christian who continues to struggle with sin until he is glorified. This is Paul’s experience as a Christian and the experience of all true Christians. (2) The experience of unbelievers. (3) The experience of the OT saint living during the era of the Mosaic Law before Christ came – (a) This is the experience of an OT unbelieving Jew under the Law; (b) This is an OT true believer during the Mosaic era who is trying to please God by keeping the Mosaic Law but is frustrated by his inability to keep God’s Law; (c) This is the experience of the Jew before Christ came without specific regard as to whether the person is a believer or unbeliever. (4) The experience of a Christian who tries to live his life by keeping the Mosaic Law instead of living by the Holy Spirit [“Theology 3 Course Notes,” Lecture, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, 228-29].

<sup>4</sup> The below overview and evaluation of interpretations will frequently refer to “law” or “Law.” This will be further discussed in the Theological Implications section. For the time being, when this essay refers to the “law,” it refers broadly to God’s righteous standards; when this essay refers to the “Law,” it refers narrowly to the Mosaic Law.

<sup>5</sup> To be clear, the “issues” (and interpretative challenges) exist with the interpreter, not with the inerrant, perspicuous text of the Word of God.

- A. The identity of ἐγὼ (egō, I)<sup>6</sup>
1. Autobiographical “I” (Paul’s experience)
  2. Representative “I” (Adam, Israel, Paul in solidarity with Israel/Jews under the Law)
  3. Rhetorical “I” (no particular person or experience; everyone in general)
- B. The spiritual state of ἐγὼ (egō, I)
1. Unregenerate in 7:7-25
  2. Regenerate in 7:7-25
  3. Unregenerate in 7:7-13, Regenerate in 7:14-25
  4. Spiritual state not in view

Who is the “I” in Romans 7:7-25?

*View 1: Autobiographical “I” (i.e., Paul)*<sup>7</sup>

*Explanation of View 1.* This view simply interprets Rom 7:7-25 as Paul speaking about his own experiences. The proponents for this view include Augustine,<sup>8</sup> James Boice, William Combs, David Dockery, F. F. Bruce, Robert Haldane, John Hart, William Hendriksen, Charles Hodge, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, R. C. H. Lenski, Martin Luther, John MacArthur, Michael Middendorf, Leon Morris, J. I. Packer, Thomas Schreiner, R. C. Sproul, and Andy Woods.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer proposes five major views: (1) autobiographical; (2) psychological – a young Jewish boy passing from youthful innocence to adolescent experience and the requirements of the Mosaic Law; (3) as Adam; (4) as a Christian; and (5) in a cosmic-historical dimension – a rhetorical egō is used to dramatize the experience common to all unregenerate human beings faced with law and relying on their own resources to meet its obligations [*Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 463-64].

<sup>7</sup> William Hendriksen lists the following proponents of this view: R. A. Batey, H. Bavinck, L. Berkhof, G. C. Berkouwer, F. F. Bruce, J. Calvin, C. E. B. Cranfield, J. Fraser, S. Greijdanus, R. Haldane, F. E. Hamilton, C. Hodge, J. Knox, R. C. H. Lenski, M. Luther, J. Murray, A. Nygren, C. Pronk, C. C. Thomas and D. N. Steele, J. Van Andel, Van Leeuwen and Jacobs, and G. B. Wilson; he also includes the following Evangelical creeds as supporters: *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Belgic Confession*, *The Heidelberg Catechism* [*Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 229-30].

<sup>8</sup> It has been well documented that Augustine in 394/95 AD initially believed that “I” in Rom 7:14-25 was the quintessential unregenerate person, and gradually changed and refined his views: 411 AD – Christian under grace; 415 AD – Christian believer; 417 AD – Regenerate Paul and all Christians; 427 AD – Denounces the interpretation of “I” as the unregenerate under the law and affirms regenerate Paul (Christopher T. Bounds, “Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans 7:14-25, His Ordo Salutis and His Consistent Believe in Christian’s Victory over Sin.” *The Asbury Journal* 64/2 (2009): 20-21).

<sup>9</sup> James M. Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 743-44, 755; William W. Combs, “Does the Believer Have One Nature or Two?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 93; David Dockery, “Romans 7:14-25: Pauline Tension in the Christian Life.” *Grace Theological Journal* 2.2 (Fall 1981): 240; F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 150; Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 277; John F. Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith in Romans 7:7-25.” *Bibliotheca*

*Arguments for View 1.* At times, interpreters differ over what experiences in Paul's life he may be describing. For example, 7:7-13 can refer to the awakening of the sinful impulse at the time of Paul's coming of age (e.g., bar mitzvah), or the realization of condemnation just before his conversion.<sup>10</sup> In 7:14-25, Paul may be "describing his experience as a Jew under the law, his immediate post-conversion struggle with the law, or his continuing struggle to obey the law as a Christian."<sup>11</sup> Bottom line, the primary argument for this view is that the autobiographical "I" best explains the use of "I" in Rom 7:7-25. The natural sense of the text is the author expressing true personal experiences. When Paul uses the emphatic egō, he always has a specific referent in mind, which excludes the representative or abstract uses of "I."<sup>12</sup> There are no indications for "I" to *not* refer to Paul in Rom 7. The emotion and agony "I" expresses would be melodramatic, artificial, and theatrical if Paul was not describing his own experience.<sup>13</sup>

*Objections to View 1.* Paul cannot be describing his own experience because there was no time when he was without the law, referring broadly to God's righteous standards (cf. 7:9). Even Jewish children were instructed in the Law from their earliest years (cf. 2 Tim 3:15). Also, the conclusion that Rom 7:7-13 describes Paul's pre-conversion experience lacks support since

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*Sacra* 170 (July-September 2012): 341; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 219-20; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 217; Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 132; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1945), 458; Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1954), 111; John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1991), 368; Michael P. Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 153; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 277; J. I. Packer, "The 'Wretched Man' Revisited" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 74, 77; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 365; R. C. Sproul, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 220; Andy Woods, "Romans 7 and Sanctification." *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 14:2 (Fall 2009): 4.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 425.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Michael P. Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*. BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 363.

Scripture does not give an indication of a pre-conversion struggle. Gal 1:13-14 and Phil 3:4-6 poignantly illustrate Paul's pre-conversion self-righteous heart: full (disillusioned) confidence in fulfilling the righteous requirements of the Law. The references to life and death cannot be reconciled to Paul's life experiences, particularly if 7:7-14 refer to his pre-conversion.

*View 2: Representative "I" (i.e., Adam, Israel, or Paul in solidarity with Israel/the Jews)*

*Explanation of View 2.* According to this view, "I" depicts the life experience of a representative figure. Some have postulated that "I" in Rom 7:7-25 is Adam's experience in the Garden. Others argue that Paul is identifying his own experience with the people of Israel at the time of the giving of the Law at Sinai. The proponents for this view generally include Ernest Best (Paul's experiences, Adam and Eve, Jews, every person), James Dunn (Adam), Charles Hodge (representative of every renewed man), H. A. Ironside (Paul in solidarity with Israel), Douglas Moo (Paul in solidarity with Israel), and N. T. Wright (Israel under the law).<sup>14</sup>

*Arguments for View 2 (General).* Scripture elsewhere uses the first person pronoun to represent others or a collective group. "For example, it is found in the Old Testament (Psalms 22, 51, 130), in Paul (Romans 3:7; 11:19; 1 Corinthians 13:11-12), and in Jewish literature (Wisdom 9). In the Psalms and the Jewish literature, 'I' often represents the Jewish nation and the speaker rather than the speaker alone."<sup>15</sup> The context (i.e., the relationship with the Law) best explains the application of "I's" experiences to the readers (whether under the representation by Adam

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 81, 84-85; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word books Publisher, 1988), 382, 400, 404; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 202; H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1951), 89-90; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 427; N. T. Wright, *Volume X* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 552.

<sup>15</sup> Woods, "Romans 7 and Sanctification." *CTSJ* 14:2 (Fall 2009): 4.

applying to all persons, or Paul in solidarity with Israel applying to Jews living under the Law). The two significant views of the representative “I” are (1) Adam and (2) the nation of Israel.

*Arguments for View 2 – Representative Adam.* Of Adam, it is argued that the circumstances in Rom 7 fit Adam’s circumstance in the Garden.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Schreiner summarizes this view,

In Adam’s case sin did not exist in the human race before the giving of the commandment. Adam was not already a sinner when God gave him the command in the garden, rather he experienced the joys of having a close relationship with God. The possibility of sin arose only with the dissemination of the commandment. Paul focuses on coveting because the desire to eat from the forbidden tree is the root of sin in both Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:6 indicates that Eve’s sin can be traced to a “desire” to be wise. This very desire is idolatrous, and the eating of the tree was simply the outward expression of the idolatry that surfaced in her heart.<sup>17</sup>

It is argued that Rom 7:9-10 is only true of Adam—only Adam could be said to be alive before the commandment. Similarly, only Adam could experience death when he transgressed God’s requirement. This best fits the context of Rom 5:12-21. Of Adam’s death, Schreiner says, “Only Adam was truly alive in the full theological sense before encountering and transgressing the commandment given in the garden of Eden.”<sup>18</sup>

*Objections to View 2 – Representative Adam.* The representative Adam view seems to be driven by a presupposed theological framework. This view appears to go hand-in-hand with Covenant Theology, particularly the covenant of works and of grace.<sup>19</sup> First, Scripture never mentions Adam receiving the Ten Commandments or the Torah (the Law). The quote from the

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<sup>16</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 360.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>19</sup> See R. C. Sproul, *Romans*. St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 207-08.

Ten Commandments on coveting weakens an Adamic connection in Rom 7. There is nothing in either text (Rom 7 or Gen 1-3) to suggest a connection or parallel account.

*Arguments for View 2 – Representative Israel.* Of Israel, the representative “I” depicts Israel’s reception of the Law at Sinai (cf. Ex 19ff; 34:32), their transgression (cf. Ex 32; Jer 3:6-11; 11:10), and their subsequent death (cf. Num 32:13; Deut 28:58-68).<sup>20</sup> Rom 7:8-10 cannot be neatly matched in Paul’s life, but fits well with Israel’s history: after receiving the Mosaic Covenant, Israel experienced judgment due to covenant disobedience.

*Objections to View 2 – Representative Israel.* The strongest objections to this view relate to Rom 7:9-10. In what capacity was Israel alive before receiving the Law? Did the nation of Israel have a sense of personal righteousness before receiving the Law? If it is argued that Israel was “alive” in whatever capacity before receiving the Law and died after the Law came, how does one reconcile Rom 7:14-25 with Israel’s history? When did the nation of Israel either struggle with seeking to keep the Law, or, after being regenerated, struggle broadly with sin and with living according to God’s righteousness? More questions and problems arise with this view.

*View 3: Rhetorical “I” (i.e., literary device that depicts all of humanity)*

*Explanation of View 3.* In 1929, W. G. Kümmel set forth the fictive use of “I” in Rom 7. He argued that Rom 7:9 could not be seen as part of Paul’s life; thus, the referent in 7:7-25 cannot be Paul. “I” then is a literary device that depicts all of humanity. So, it is not autobiographical, but represents the experience of everyone. The proponents for this view generally include Joseph Fitzmyer and N. T. Wright.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 361.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 465, 467; N. T. Wright, *Volume X* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 553.

*Arguments for View 3.* N. T. Wright was cited to support View 2, yet his commentary also seems to support View 3, the Rhetorical “I,”

The “I” of 7:7-25, which on any showing is a remarkable rhetorical feature, may then be approached within Paul’s two main controlling narratives: (a) the story of Adam and the Messiah, and (b) the new exodus. Torah intrudes within the first (5:20); Sinai is a key moment in the second. Within these, Paul appears to be speaking of Israel: of Israel under Torah; of Israel when Torah arrived (7:7-12); of Israel continuing to live under Torah thereafter (7:13-25). But he is not thereby speaking of how Israel under Torah would itself analyze the problem....The present passage seems, then, to be a Christian theological analysis of what was in fact the case, and indeed what is still the case for those who live “under the law,” not a description of how it felt or feels....The point of the “I,” as a rhetorical device, then becomes clear. Though we can learn a certain amount on this topic from considerations of how “autobiographical” language was used in ancient rhetoric, the main thing this teaches us is simply that such language could be used for purposes other than literal descriptions of one’s own actual experience.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, though 7:7-13 speaks of Israel, the struggle with keeping the Law in 7:14-25 is a demonstration of a rhetorical device that represents the experience of believers, not the nation of Israel—a literary transition (from Israel to New Testament Christians) that supports the rhetorical use of “I.” Beyond this, proponents of this view seem to presuppose the rhetorical use of “I” and spend the rest of their comments explaining how the rhetorical “I” fits in the interpretation of Rom 7, instead of providing support.

*Objections to View 3.* While *egō* can be used as a rhetorical device, it is not frequent with Paul and is almost always in the conditional or hypothetical, as opposed to the descriptive and narrative of Rom 7.<sup>23</sup> Andy Woods summarizes the objections to View 3,

Three facts make the Rhetorical “I” view implausible. First, elsewhere in Romans, Paul uses the pronoun “I” to describe himself (Romans 15:14). Second, the depth and intensity of feeling and anguish (7:10, 11, 15, 23) seem to indicate that verses 7-25 reflect Paul’s personal experience. Third, the personal outcry and confession (7:24, 25a) also indicate that verses 7-25 reflect Paul’s personal experience.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *Volume X* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 552-53.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 427.

There is no justifiable reason to abandon the natural sense of the use of the personal pronoun in Rom 7.

To review, we considered three major views on the identity of “I”:

- A. The identity of ἐγὼ (egō, I)<sup>25</sup>
1. Autobiographical “I” (Paul’s experience)
  2. Representative “I” (Adam, Israel, Paul in solidarity with Israel/Jews under the Law)
  3. Rhetorical “I” (no particular person or experience; everyone in general)

We now turn to consider the major views on the spiritual state of “I”:

- B. The spiritual state of ἐγὼ (egō, I)
1. Unregenerate in 7:7-25
  2. Regenerate in 7:7-25
  3. Unregenerate in 7:7-13, Regenerate in 7:14-25
  4. Spiritual state not in view

What is the spiritual state described in Romans 7:7-25?

*View 1: Unregenerate in 7:7-25*

*Explanation of View 1.* This view holds that “I” in 7:7-25 is unregenerate. This is generally affected by one’s view of the identification of “I” (i.e., Israel under the Law would presume unregenerate state). Proponents include Douglas Moo, Joseph Fitzmyer, and N. T. Wright.<sup>26</sup> H. A. Ironside may be a supporter.<sup>27</sup>

*Arguments for View 1.* Moo argues that “Paul in vv. 7-11 is describing his own involvement, as a member of the people of Israel, with the giving of the [L]aw to his people at

<sup>24</sup> Woods, “Romans 7 and Sanctification,” *CTSJ* 14:2 (Fall 2009): 4.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer proposes five major views: (1) autobiographical; (2) psychological – a young Jewish boy passing from youthful innocence to adolescent experience and the requirements of the Mosaic Law; (3) as Adam; (4) as a Christian; and (5) in a cosmic-historical dimension – a rhetorical egō is used to dramatize the experience common to all unregenerate human beings faced with law and relying on their own resources to meet its obligations [*Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 463-64].

<sup>26</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 431, 441, 447; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 465, 473; Wright, *Volume X*, 552.

<sup>27</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1951), 89, 92.

Sinai,” thus Paul is describing his as well as Israel’s experience of being confronted with God’s Law.<sup>28</sup> In 7:14-25, Paul “portrays his own *condition as a Jew under the [L]aw*, but, more importantly, the *condition of all Jews under the [L]aw*” (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup> Such conditions under the Law presume an unregenerate state, since the Jew failed to keep the Law of God, which incurred judgment. The language is confusing because Paul is looking back to his past through the present lens of a Christian (i.e., post Rom 7:25).<sup>30</sup> The strength of this view comes from the flow of the chapter:

Whereas vv. 7-13 were a confession, in which the Ego recognized its deception by sin, which made use of the [L]aw, now vv. 14-25 become an apology [i.e., defense] for the [L]aw itself. For this reason it is expressed in the present tense. Paul uses it to show the uselessness of any attempt to fulfill demands of legal righteousness apart from God’s grace. The problem is not with the [L]aw itself, but with the human condition....Paul describes the moral experience of the Ego faced with the [L]aw, depicting it as a battle between the Ego of flesh dominated by sin and the spiritual law of God.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, how can a regenerate person still be carnal (cf. 7:14)? How can a regenerate person declare that there is nothing good inside him (7:18)? One would presume that if “I” were regenerate, he would be liberated from sin (cf. 6:1ff). It seems that Rom 6 is a complete contradiction if the “I” in Rom 7:14-25 were regenerated. Rom 8:1 begins with the contrastive conjunctions Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν (*ouden ara nyn*, “therefore there is now”), distinguishing the reign of sin from the reign of the Spirit—unregenerate (i.e., Rom 7) to regenerate (i.e., Rom 8).

*Objections to View 1.* This view does not adequately explain the change in tenses between vv. 7-13 and vv. 14-25. Also, apart from v. 14, vv. 14-25 seem to have very little to do with the Mosaic Law. The struggle is with *sin*, though the Law was the occasion that excited sin.

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<sup>28</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 431.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>30</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 448; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 465.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 473.

Rom 7 does not seem like the description of one trying to live under the Law. The fact “that the Law is spiritual but I am of flesh” (7:14) is in harmony with the fact that the Law is good and I am exceedingly sinful. While there might be a contrast in emphases between 7:14-25 and 8:1ff, there is still hope or victory over sin before Rom 8 (7:24, 25). Besides, there is still tension in the life under the Spirit (cf. 8:10, 13). Other writings of Paul affirm a believer’s struggle with sin (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; Gal 5:17; Phil 3:12-14). This work of sanctification will not be completed in this life (cf. Phil 1:6; 1 John 1:8). Also, Rom 6 does not imply sinless perfection, or uninhibited obedience as slaves to righteousness. Therefore, Paul commands that the believer fight indwelling sin (cf. 6:12, 13, 19). Many of the dramatic statements in Rom 7 would be expected of a regenerated heart struggling with indwelling sin. He may be agonizing over sin, thus declaring sweeping conclusions (e.g., nothing good dwells in my flesh). Yet that is not the whole reality as God sees it (i.e., justification or positional sanctification; cf. 2 Cor 5:17). It is expected of a *believer* to delight in God’s law (7:11).

*View 2: Regenerate in 7:7-25*

*Explanation of View 2.* This view holds that the “I” in 7:7-25 is regenerate. In vv. 7-13, he is describing conversion, which presupposes regeneration; in vv. 14-25, he is describing the principle of indwelling sin. Proponents include James Boice, John Hart, Charles Hodge, Martin Luther, and R. C. Sproul.<sup>32</sup> James Dunn may be a supporter.<sup>33</sup>

*Arguments for View 2.* The conviction described in 7:9-10 can only be applied to believers. Only true believers ascribe God’s law as holy, righteous, and good (7:12). R. C. Sproul

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<sup>32</sup> James M. Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 743-44, 764; John F. Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith in Romans 7:7-25.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (July-September 2012): 341; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 202, 207; Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1954), 112, 115; R. C. Sproul, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 220.

<sup>33</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word books Publisher, 1988), 407.

argues, “When the apostle speaks autobiographically in Romans 7 of the struggle that continues between the flesh and the spirit, he is talking about the struggle that characterizes every *Christian’s* life. This dashes to the dust all false doctrines of sanctification that promise perfection this side of heaven” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> The struggle pictured may be that of an immature believer (weakness in faith) or the increased sensitivity to sin of a mature believer. Other arguments for View 2 overlap with objections to View 1.

*Objections to View 2.* Sproul’s argument may inappropriately extend the principle of indwelling sin. The logical end of View 2 may be that a believer can never experience a season of blamelessness (cf. Gen 6:9; Job 1:1), since it is argued that the believer struggles to the extent of Rom 7. Indeed, there is a reality of struggle; yet there is the reality of earthly victories against the flesh (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). This view also fails to adequately explain the experience of encountering the command of God and dying while being regenerated.

*View 3: Unregenerate in 7:7-13, Regenerate in 7:14-25*

*Explanation of View 3.* This view understands 7:7-13 to specifically describe the pre-conversion experience and 7:14-25 to describe post-conversion. This view is not simply a combining of arguments of Views 1 and 2. The distinction is one who became aware of sin and his condemnation through the impressing of God’s law/Law, and the struggle to live for God. Proponents include Augustine (examining 7:14-25), William Combs, David Dockery, F. F. Bruce, Robert Haldane, William Hendriksen, R. C. H. Lenski, John MacArthur, Michael

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<sup>34</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 220.

Middendorf, Leon Morris, J. I. Packer (unclear concerning 7:7-13), and Andy Woods (examining 7:14-25).<sup>35</sup>

*Arguments for View 3.* 7:7-13 is best understood, in Paul's personal experiences, as describing his pre-conversion experience. Other Scriptures highlight the deceit of self-righteousness from a human observance of the Law (cf. Luke 18:9-17; Phil 3:4-6). So, the understanding that Paul, speaking from his present state as a believer (presently experiencing 7:14-25) and looking back at his self-righteous blindness (7:7-13), is most persuasive. It was only until God's law/Law was impressed upon him that convicted him of his depravity. He thought he was alive, but he was truly spiritually dead (cf. Eph 2:1). This is the same heart attitude that ushers one into the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt 5:3). As an aside, the description and experience of a 7:7-13 person does not universally apply to the experience of all unregenerate persons. In other words, God is working in a person to move *from 7:7-13 to 7:14-25*. 7:14-25 is best understood as describing a regenerate person because the woes of 7:7-13 are no longer present. Rather, the woes now are the struggle with sin. Paul understood that through Christ's death, he was no longer bound to the law of sin (Rom 6:4; 7:6).

*Objections to View 3.* This view neglects the centrality of the Law in the context of Rom 5-8. Also, the change in tense verbs does not necessarily conclude a change in spiritual state.

Other objections overlap with previously stated arguments for support of the other views.

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher T. Bounds, "Augustine's Interpretation of Romans 7:14-25, His Ordo Salutis and His Consistent Believe in Christian's Victory over Sin." *The Asbury Journal* 64/2 (2009): 20-21; William W. Combs, "Does the Believer Have One Nature or Two?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 92-95; David Dockery, "Romans 7:14-25: Pauline Tension in the Christian Life." *Grace Theological Journal* 2.2 (Fall 1981): 247; F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 150, 154; Robert Haldene, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 302-03; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 220, 228; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1945), 466, 475, 477; John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1991), 378-80; Michael P. Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 184, 224; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 277; J. I. Packer, "The 'Wretched Man' Revisited" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 76; Andy Woods, "Romans 7 and Sanctification." *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 14:2 (Fall 2009): 11.

*View 4: Spiritual State Not in View*

*Explanation of View 4.* This view states that in the context of Rom 5-8, Paul is not discussing justification or sanctification (unregenerate and regenerate). Proponents of this view include Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Thomas Schreiner.<sup>36</sup> Ernest Best may be a supporter.<sup>37</sup>

*Arguments for View 4.* Thomas Schreiner says that while he recognizes Paul's shift in tense verbs to depict the spiritual condition captive to the power of sin, "the passage does not intend to adjudicate between Christian and pre-Christian experience. It centers on the inherent inability of the [L]aw 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."<sup>38</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that neither the unregenerate nor regenerate are in view because it would contradict the flow of the context from Rom 5:20.<sup>39</sup> Rom 5:20 is the key: "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." The Christian is now in Christ in Rom 5. So, in Rom 7, Paul is describing the function of the Law and its relationship to Christians.<sup>40</sup> Rom 7 is not necessarily describing conversion, but rather the function and nature of the Law.

*Objections to View 4.* This may fit nicely with the overall context; however, it is not adequate to answer the questions of interpretation in the immediate context. For example, why

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<sup>36</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7.1-8.4. The Law: Its Functions and Limits* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 191-92; Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 390.

<sup>37</sup> Ernest Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 86.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 379.

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 191-92.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-11.

are life and death, flesh and spirit mentioned if not relating to the spiritual state of a person? Why does Paul cry out for saving (7:24)?

### Preferred Views

Who is the “I” in Rom 7:7-25? Paul (View 1)

Given the above arguments and objections to other views, the referent of “I” is Paul. It seems that the key in evaluating these views focus on three issues: (1) the semantic usage of *egō*, (2) the identification of “law” in Rom 7, and (3) the experience of life then death in Rom 7:9-10.<sup>41</sup> While *egō* has a broad lexical range, its natural sense is the best interpretation in the immediate context—the writer, Paul, is talking about himself. Given the context of Rom 5-8, “law” in Rom 7:6-12, 14, 16 refers to the Mosaic Law. The “law of God” (Rom 7:22, 25) refers broadly to God’s righteous standard, which is faithfully reflected in the Mosaic Law. The description of life then death in the text is (1) Paul’s personal anecdote of a self-righteous conclusion of obtaining spiritual life through legalistic adherence to the Mosaic Law, then (2) subsequent realization of his spiritual deadness through the illumination, conviction, and condemnation of the spirit of the law (or the law of God, or the righteousness of God). In other words, Paul thought he fulfilled God’s righteous requirements by his own works, thus having spiritual life, but through the Holy Spirit’s conviction, Paul realized that the law of God (and Mosaic Law) actually condemned him, revealing his actual spiritual state—dead.

What is the spiritual state described in Rom 7:7-25?  
Unregenerate in 7:7-13, Regenerate in 7:14-25 (View 3)

While the Law is directly focused upon in Rom 7 (vv. 7, 13), it may be helpful to remember the nature of sin in the context of Rom 5-8. Sin and death spread to all men; every person was under the dominion of sin (cf. Rom 5:12). Yet through Christ, believers are liberated from the penalty of sin (cf. Rom 5:15ff). So, while the consequence of sin is death because God’s righteousness law condemns evil, the Law is not sin and did not cause death (Rom 7:7, 13). Rom

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<sup>41</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 426-27.

7:7-25 is not a struggle with the law/Law (i.e., a keeping of the righteous requirements of the law). Rom 7:7-25 is sin twisting the Law—which is holy, righteous, and good—and corrupting every part of a person, including his flesh, which God has promised to renew with glorified bodies. While the penalty of sin is addressed, the presence of sin is continually confronted. Sin, then, is like a beast that will continue to hound the believer until his glorification (cf. Phil. 1:6). Given this context, as well as the above arguments for View 3 and the objections to the other views, the unregenerate in 7:7-13 and regenerate in 7:14-25 seems to be the best interpretation.

#### A Synthesis of the Preferred Views

In Rom 7:7-25, Paul shares his personal experience of struggling with obedience and sin, which serves as a paradigm for all believers. Paul shared about his experience as a self-righteous Pharisee who sought to merit God's righteousness through human efforts at keeping the Law of God. Sin used the Law as opportunities for sin (e.g., self-righteousness, coveting). Having been liberated from sin through Christ's death, Paul (including all believers) is no longer a slave to sin (Rom 6:1-23). Similarly, having been freed from the demands for obeying and consequences for disobeying the Law, Paul has been given victory in Christ's fulfillment of the Law (Rom 7:1-4; cf. Matt 5:17-20). However, Paul continued to struggle with sin due to the presence of indwelling sin, though being in Christ. Paul's failures may cause him to waver on whether or not he had been truly liberated from sin and the penalty of the law/Law (7:22-23). Believers identify with Paul's experience. We rejoice in liberty from sin; we desire to obey. Yet we struggle; we fail; we contradict our desires or will by our actions. So then, while liberation from the penalty of sin has been secured, liberation from the presence of sin continues on. Michael Middendorf concludes that

*Paul uses Romans 7 to exclude the possibility of anyone attempting either to become righteous or to maintain a righteous standing before God by observing the Law's*

*commands*. All those who are under the Law's lordship (7:1) or who rely upon the Law before God (2:17) are, rather, condemned by the Law. This is because God's Law requires man's "doing" (2:13, 25; 10:5 citing Lev. 18:5; see also Gal. 3:10-12, citing Deut. 27:26 and Lev. 18:5) and no one, not even one who has faith, is able to fulfill the Law to the extent God requires (Rom. 3:19-20; 7:14-25; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). In Romans 7:7-25 Paul vividly illustrates why this is from the experience of his own life. The Law's command had no positive role in his attainment of the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ [righteousness of God] (vv. 7-11); neither was Paul's continued justified status a matter of first faith and then obedience to the Law (vv. 14-25). His own life exemplifies why it is "impossible" (Rom. 8:3) to use the Law as a means to earn or maintain God's favor.<sup>42</sup> (emphasis his)

In other words, there is no power in behavior modification to restrain the sinful flesh; the power is the Gospel of Christ and life by the Holy Spirit in faith (cf. Rom 1:16-17; 8:10-11). Paul, and all believers, cannot merit God's righteousness through works (i.e., the Law), but, having been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are able to walk according to the righteousness of God. Believers will continually fight indwelling sin until glorification (see Rom 8:1ff).

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<sup>42</sup> Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm*, 259-60.

## Theological Implications

Romans 7:7-25 provides numerous applications for Christian living; it is not theology that puffs one up with intellectual pride. The following highlights some significant theological subjects relevant to the doctrine of progressive sanctification (e.g., how does one grow in godliness?).

### The Significance of the Law

The “law” is a significant theme in the Book of Romans. The Greek noun νόμος (*nomos*), frequently translated as “law,” occurs 194 times in the New Testament (for example, 74x in Romans, 32x in Galatians, 17x in Acts, 15x in John, 14x in Hebrews, 10x in James). It has a wide semantic range:

the general sense of “rule, principle” (e.g., Rom 7:21, 23), to the narrower sense “binding regulation” (7:2b–3), then the more specific denotation “the Mosaic legal system” (by far the most common use, e.g., 2:12–20), as well as “Pentateuch” (contrasted with “Prophets,” e.g., 3:21b) and “Scripture” (e.g., 3:19, summarizing previous [references] to the Psalms and the Prophets).<sup>43</sup>

In other words, “law” does not simply or always refer to the Mosaic Law in Scripture. The word may refer broadly to a principle (e.g., law of nature), to God’s righteous standards, or to the Old Testament Scriptures; or narrowly to the Mosaic Law (Covenant)—context determines its usage or referent. The Book of Romans alone demonstrates its wide semantic range and Paul’s varied usage. Unable to provide a full exposition, it has been concluded that Paul mainly uses “law” in Rom 7 to refer to the Mosaic Law. It would be helpful to simply note three observations on the “law” from Rom 7:4-13: (1) Paul declares the believer freed from the *Mosaic* Law (i.e., freed from the requirement to fulfill God’s righteous standards through covenant obedience), (2) the *Mosaic* Law is good (i.e., faithfully reflects the righteousness of God, or the *law of God*), and (3)

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<sup>43</sup> Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 410.

the *Mosaic* Law cannot deliver the unrighteous man from God's wrath. Christ fulfills the righteousness of God by fulfilling the *Mosaic* Law on behalf of His elect (cf. Matt 5:17-20; Gal 3:10-14). The Mosaic Law is good because (1) it truly reflected the law of God (God's righteousness) and (2) it convicts of sin and condemns sinners. So then, having been freed from the Law as well as fulfilling the Law through Christ, believers are now under the law of Christ, which also truly reflects the law of God (God's righteousness). Thus, believers still walk in a manner consistent with the righteousness of God (cf. Rom 8:1-13; Matt 5-7; Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21), similar to Old Testament saints under the Mosaic Law.

Does being under the law of Christ mean we do not need to obey the commands in the Mosaic Law? What is the relationship between the Mosaic Law and New Testament believers who are under the law of Christ? If the Mosaic Law cannot deliver a sinner from wrath, can believers ignore it? The righteousness of God (broadly, *law*) is faithfully reflected in the Mosaic Law, which was given to the nation of Israel to keep for a covenant relationship (cf. Ex. 19:5-6), and also fulfilled through Christ's life, death, and resurrection (cf. Matt. 5:17-20; Gal. 3:1-29; 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). Specific aspects of the Mosaic Law are expected to be followed by NT believers because they are consistent with the law of God—not exclusive to the specific covenant relationship between God and Israel (e.g., to not murder; cf. Gen. 4:6-12; 9:6; Ex. 20:13; Matt. 5:21-22). This helps one understand why NT believers are not expected to follow aspects that are exclusive to the Mosaic Law (e.g., dietary laws).

### Lordship Salvation and Carnal Christianity

"I believed in Jesus as Savior when I was in middle school, but did not submit to Him as Lord until college." This is a familiar description by those who have a misunderstanding of

justification and sanctification. Part of the problem has come from misinterpretations of Rom 7. In particular, Rom 7:14 has been deeply abused (“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”). It is one of the main verses to support the idea of the “carnal Christian”—a self-professing Christian who has not surrendered himself to Christ through repentance of sins and obedience. The contrast in Rom 7 and 8 are taken to be stages of progressive sanctification, thus separating a response of obedience or pursuit of godliness from justification. The understanding of the carnal Christian can be confusing since it does include some biblical truths; namely, Christians still sin and will not experience final victory over sin apart from the Holy Spirit. However, a two-stage Christian experience is not biblical. Rom 7 is not depicting a worldly Christian, then Rom 8 a mature Christian. Rather, Rom 7 is Paul describing the struggle “between himself as a new creature in Christ, the new man, and that of the sinful, un-Christian nature that he nevertheless retains in some measure. The struggle is part of what it means to be a Christian in an as-yet unperfected state.”<sup>44</sup> Rom 7 does not condone living in sin, the lack of repentance, or the neglect of confronting sin.

#### The Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification

Sanctification means to be set apart or set aside. Theologically, it refers to a new position before God, no longer the object of His wrath (cf. Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:10-12, 14; 13:12-13). The Christian is set aside for God’s possession and is declared holy by faith in Christ. Bruce Demarest further describes this positional sanctification: “By positional or objective sanctification—which we may call the indicative of sanctification—we mean the believer’s being set aside for God’s possession and declared holy by faith in Christ’s justifying work.”<sup>45</sup> Since every believer is sanctified in Christ Jesus, the appropriate New Testament designation of all

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<sup>44</sup> Boice, *Romans*, 759.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 407.

believers is “saints,” “sanctified,” or “holy ones.” William Vine says, “Thus sainthood, or sanctification, is not an attainment, it is the state into which God, in grace, calls sinful men, and in which they begin their course as Christians (Col. 3:12; Heb 3:1).”<sup>46</sup>

*Progressive* sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He continually renews and transforms Christians into the likeness of Christ and causes them to grow in godliness. Wayne Grudem defines progressive sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”<sup>47</sup> Millard Erickson says, “Sanctification is a process by which one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God;” being made holy is meant by “bearing an actual likeness to God.”<sup>48</sup> This process begins at regeneration (cf. 1 Cor 6:11), and is accomplished by God through the ministry of His Word (cf. 1 Pet 1:2; John 17:17). This will be completed at one’s physical death or when Christ returns (cf. Phil 3:20-21; 1 Cor 15:23). This is clearly seen in Rom 5-8, particularly in chapter 7. Rom 7:7-25 depicts one whom God regenerated since sin brought death, and whom God will bring ultimate victory over the sinful flesh.

#### Nature of Indwelling Sin In Christians

As Rom 7 clearly demonstrates, sin still remains in believers (cf. 1 John 1:10). Yet sin is not befitting of the people of God (cf. 1 John 3:9). Believers are no longer held captive to sin; thus, they should not dwell in sin (cf. Rom 6). Rom 7 depicts an active principle of sin, bringing death (vv. 7-13) and causing entanglement (vv. 14-25). Rom 7 should clarify the nature of indwelling sin and exhort believers to make no provision for the flesh (cf. Rom 8:13; 13:14).

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<sup>46</sup> William E. Vine, *Vine’s Amplified Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, 1991), 3:318.

<sup>47</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 746.

<sup>48</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 980.

### Dual Nature of Christians

A study of Rom 7 uncovers a variety of interpretive challenges. For example, does the believer have two natures, a sin nature and a renewed nature? Or, is a believer a wholly new creation, with indwelling sin? How does the flesh relate to the believer? Believers are made completely new (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10)—new heart and new spirit (cf. Ezek 36:36), new birth (John 3:3), new life (cf. Rom 6:4; Eph 2:5). However, believers still have sin (cf. 1 John 1:8). Believers wait for glorification to receive new bodies, absent of sinful flesh (cf. Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 15:50-57). Rom 7 depicts a principle of indwelling sin within one's flesh, which will be renewed at glory.

## Conclusion

This essay sought to evaluate the present major views of Rom 7:7-25 and highlight significant theological implications related to the doctrine of progressive sanctification. More work is required for there is an interpretive challenge in nearly every verse in that chapter. A thorough study of Rom 7:7-25 provides all believers with a robust theology illustrated from Paul's experience. It will impact one's understanding of anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology. Let us remember that we were created to worship God yet rebelled (Rom 1:18-21). Let us remember that we were sinners condemned to death for our unrighteousness (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Let us remember God's abounding grace and mercy to declare us righteous through faith in Christ (Rom 3:24-26; 5:1-11). Let us remember that the appropriate response of our salvation is faithful obedience (Rom 6:1ff). Though we may fail on this side of glory to consistently obey, we thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord through whom we have victory (Rom 7:25a; 8:29-39).

## Appendix A: Arguments List

Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 445-48

Unregenerate 7:14-25

1. Strong connection of egō with “the flesh” (vv. 14, 18, 25) suggests that Paul is elaborating on the unregenerate condition mentioned in 7:5: being “in the flesh”
2. Egō throughout passage struggles “on his own” (cf. “I myself” in v. 25), without aid of HS
3. Egō is “under the power of sin” (v. 14b), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22)
4. As the unsuccessful struggle of vv. 15-20 shows, egō is a “prisoner of the law of sin” (v. 23). Yet Rom 8:2 proclaims that believers have been set free from this same “law of sin (and death)”
5. While Paul makes clear that believers will continue to struggle with sin (cf. 6:12-13; 13:12-14; Gal 5:17), what is depicted in 7:14-25 is not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin. This is a more negative view of the Christian life than can be accommodated within Paul’s theology
6. The egō in these verses struggle with the need to obey the Mosaic Law; yet Paul has already proclaimed the release of the believer from the dictates of the law (6:14; 7:4-6)

Regenerate 7:14-25

1. Egō must refer to Paul himself, and the shift from the past tenses of vv. 7-13 to the present tenses of vv. 14-25 can be explained only if Paul is describing in these latter verses his present experience as a Christian
2. Only the regenerate truly “delight in God’s law” (v. 22), seek to obey it (vv. 15-20) and “serve” it (v. 25); the unregenerate do not “seek after God” (3:11) and cannot “submit to the law of God” (8:7)
3. Whereas the “mind” of people outside Christ is universally presented by Paul as opposed to God and his will (Rom 1:28; Eph 4:17; Col 2:18; 1 Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 2:15), the “mind” of egō in this text is a positive medium, by which egō “serves the law of God” (vv. 22, 25)
4. Egō must be a Christian because only a Christian possesses the “inner person;” cf. Paul’s only other two uses of the phrase in 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16
5. The passage concludes, *after* Paul’s mention of deliverance wrought by God in Christ, with a reiteration of the divided state of the egō (vv. 24-25). This shows that the division and struggle of the egō that Paul depicts in these verses is that of the person saved by God in Christ.

Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 380-92

Christian Experience

1. Shift in present tense in 7:14-25 most naturally explained by supposition that previous verses were Paul’s pre-Christian experience. Shift not arbitrary but deliberate. 7:7-13 uses 9 past tense verbs; 7:14-25 uses 26 present indicative first person verbs. Use of present tense is therefore emphatic.
2. If 7:14-25 related to pre-Christian exp, 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.

3. In the text, there is a duality between the two "I"s.

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