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Exegetical Paper
On
Romans 7:14-25

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Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Historical Context
- III. Literary Context
- IV. Pericope Analysis: Exegesis of Romans 7.14-25
 - a. Romans 7.14
 - b. Romans 7.20b and 7.23b
 - c. Romans 7.24
- V. Summary
- VI. Appropriation – Application: Expository Sermon

I. Introduction

In what many have called Paul's greatest epistle lays what has become a theological nightmare. Near the heart of this letter there is a stumbling block which has been used by many as an excuse for when they sin. The controversy surrounding the passage of Romans 7.14-25 continues to create divisions between those who claim to be the children of God. After nearly two thousand years of debate, it is doubtful that this war will soon subside; therefore, the purpose of this paper is to study this controversial "I." Through exegesis, one will attempt to wade through the confusing muck that many theologians have created over the years. This paper will contend that the "I" of Romans 7.14-25 is not referring to Paul's current existence as a believer which offers hope for Christians to be free from struggling with sin.

II. Historical Context

In order to avoid many theological pitfalls, one will attempt to construct a proper context of Romans.¹ This study will attempt to build a firm narrative context of the whole of Romans while exploring the intricacies within. It is generally accepted that

¹ The context developed in this paper lean upon several sources. A major source is the historical context set forth as Robert Morgan attempts "to understand Romans as the religious text it is" (14) in Robert Morgan, *Romans*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 9-15. Another major source is Jeffrey S. Lamp's "rhetorical overview of [Romans 5-8]" (1) as presented in Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Holiness and New Life in Christ: A Rhetorical Overview of Romans 5-8," a paper presented at the Joint Meeting of WTS/SPS, 20-22 March 2003. Also the writer of this paper recognizes that the meaning developed and presented in this paper is partly a result of the various contexts and realities which have influenced the writer as his identity has been formed through his experiences with and development within the Wesleyan-Pentecostal community. For an in depth look at the various influences, especially the 'latter-rain' motif and the role of community, on the development how early Pentecostals interpreted the Bible and its continuing effect on Pentecostals today, please see Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter for the Making of Meaning," *Pneuma* vol. 26 no. 1 (Spring 2004), 36-59. As Archer notes, "Pentecostals will engage Scripture, do theology, and reflect upon reality from their own contextualized communities and narrative tradition." (42) It is the goal of this author to present a paper which balances, or at least hold in tension, the historical, literary and reader-response criticisms while allowing the Holy Spirit freedom to 'break-in' with a 'fresh' revelation of His Word if He so desires.

Paul authored this letter between 55 and 58 A.D. to the Christian church located in Rome.² Obviously Rome was a Gentile city; however, there must have been a strong Jewish presence (whether through heredity or conversion or a mixture of both) within the church³ as much of this letter appears directed specifically toward the Jewish community. Paul continually hammers away at issues that any Jew would have been sensitive to.⁴ The Mosaic Law and rituals, such as circumcision, come under intense fire while Abraham and other important figures in the Jewish heritage are dissected. The Law may have even appeared to have been desecrated as Paul cleverly weaved his arguments. Though all these variables lean toward this letter being directed to the Jewish population, there are also many variables which point out that the Gentiles, or at least those inclined to the Roman culture, are addressed as well. The language of Romans is masterful as Paul exercises many facets of writing.⁵ His skillful dialogue through diatribes and complicated rhetorical arguments would have captivated any Roman audience.⁶ Even though the language of this epistle may be difficult for modern Westerners to follow, it maintained a certain ‘matter-of-factness’ that the Roman culture would have appreciated. Terms such a slavery, dying and crucifixion were harsh realities that every Jew or Gentile under Roman rule would have been accustomed to. So this epistle appears written to two

² Paul J. Achtemeier, gen. ed. “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1996), 941.

³ Andrew Overman and William Scott Green, “Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1037-1054. specifically p. 1048

⁴ A.J.M. Wedderburn. *The Reasons for Romans*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 59-65.

⁵ Charles D. Myers, Jr., “Epistle to the Romans,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:816-829. “Paul’s conspicuous use of the diatribe in Romans may also indicate something about the original addressees of this epistle. Paul may have known (or at least thought it to be true) that the Romans were a sophisticated, well-educated congregation which would be familiar with this literary device.” (825)

⁶ Stanley K. Stowers, “Diatribes,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:190-193. In this article, Stowers applies modern scholarship to this writing technique and devotes the majority of a section to Paul’s application in his arguments. Specifically it is noted that Paul frequently combines diatribe with comparisons, as is the case in 7.1-6.

groups, the Jews and Gentiles, and the tension between these two traditions almost leaps from the pages.⁷

This tension comes from the meshing of cultures. The Jews found their identity in their religion. As the ‘chosen of God’, their history was based upon being the ones who were ‘called out’. Through obedience and submission to the Law along with their active and dynamic relationship with God, God was to be known to all the earth. However, the Jews found their salvation in the commandments instead of their relationship to God. Paul breaks into the picture and begins to preach a new message of ‘freedom’ to the Gentiles. The message is simple, yet profound – ‘Salvation is by faith, not by the Law.’ This liberating Gospel message shook the foundational pillars of the Jewish faith;⁸ however, Paul was very intentional about which pillars he attacked. It was not Paul’s intention to crush the Jewish faith, only to liberate it and to validate his mission to the Gentiles.

III. Literary Context

A main purpose of this letter was to stress the importance of faith in one’s relationship with God. As custodians of God’s Law, it appeared that the Jews had gradually placed more emphasis on traditions and rituals than God Himself. Paul systematically exposes their false pride in the Law and the Law’s inability to provide

⁷ Pieter W. Van Der Horst, “Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 1157-1161. This article explains the project of Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti. The project tries to find Greco-Roman literature which enhances, provides details or helps explain the New Testament writings. In the article Van Der Horst writes, “All the material collected helps us to see how deeply the earliest Christian writers were rooted in Hellenistic-Roman culture. This is not to deny or doubt the fundamentally Jewish character of the NT writings.” (1160)

⁸ Wedderburn, 51. Wedderburn notes that Paul would have probably been interpreted by his peers as too radical and that he had “betrayed Judaism and their Jewish heritage and identity.”

justification throughout the book of Romans.⁹ God's righteousness will come to *all* through faith because He looks at a person's heart, not their works.¹⁰

With Paul's continual contrasting faith to the Law, one enters the problematic second section of Romans.¹¹ With the theme shifting from 'God worked *for* us' to 'God working *in* us,'¹² Paul begins to frequently use terms such as sin, slavery and death. The relationship of sin, death and the Law becomes a main topic.¹³ One can almost see the Jew's blood boiling as Paul comes dangerously close to desecrating their sacred Law.¹⁴ Paul makes it abundantly clear in chapter six that believers have died to sin because grace was able to do that which the Law was unable – to set people free from sin. Paul continues by powerfully setting forth an ethical challenge where his imperatives state that it is the Christian's responsibility to be righteous.

Returning the main emphasis back to the Law, Paul stirs up the controversy by declaring that the believer has not only died to sin, but that they have died to the Law as well. In the marriage analogy the Law did not die, it was just rendered impotent and no longer held any power over the woman. In exposing the intimate connection between sin and the Law, many Jews may have wondered if Paul was saying that the Law was sin;

⁹ Morgan, 35.

¹⁰ Morgan, 18-28, 42. In these pages, Morgan details Paul's use of 'right' language. Morgan shows how Paul is connecting righteousness to faith while at the same time emphasizing that there is an ethical and moral dimension to righteousness.

¹¹ It is noted that scholars are divided on where to begin the second section. This study understands that many hold chapters six through eight together in an effort to emphasize sanctification while others hold chapters five through eight together. This study will emphasize that the entire context of chapters five through eight should be held together. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 246-249. Schreiner argues a thematic change beginning at 5 based upon the *dik*- words where he states, "I contend that the theme that distinguishes Rom. 5-8 from 1-4 is hope." (246) ... "The primary function of the DIK- words in Rom. 5-8 is not to explicate righteousness by faith, but to build on that justification and show what flows from it." (249)

¹² J. Ayodeji Adewuya, Class notes in NT 525 - Romans, Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN, Fall 2003.

¹³ Morgan, 38.

¹⁴ Morgan, 72-73.

however, Paul reminds the readers that the Law is God's Law. Just as God is holy and just and good, the Law is also.

With the Jewish reader still troubled, the section of Romans 7.14-25 is entered. The emphasis has been on the ethical implications for Christians in the immediately preceding sections (specifically 6.1 – 7.6). What Paul has said and shown up to these verses must not be forgotten in analyzing this problematic section.¹⁵ As the apostle Peter noted, Paul often speaks of things which are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16) and this is especially true of this paragraph. Paul's sudden shift from the first person aorist active to the first person present active at 7.14 under a static analysis would indicate that the author is the subject of present situation.¹⁶ Upon a casual glance or light reading of this passage, it would appear that Paul is living a defeated life as a believer, as if they were entrenched in a battle that can never be won. However; that analysis does not fit the context that Paul has been building in the first six chapters.¹⁷ In evaluating Paul's complicated arguments, it is a good practice to skip ahead and see where Paul is trying to go.¹⁸ In chapter eight, Paul again speaks of the believer's life in enthusiastic terms. It shows a life in the Spirit which is contrary to the defeated life portrayed in 7.14-25.

¹⁵ Wedderman, 133.

¹⁶ James Allen Hewett, *New Testament Greek: A Beginning and Intermediate Grammar*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 9-13, 66-67.

¹⁷ Lamp, 13, Michael Paul Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 11, Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 444 and Schreiner, 380. Some scholars (such as W.G. Kummel) earlier in the nineteenth century have tried to explain this problematic section through the rhetorical device of historic present. Others (such as J. I. Packer) have combated this proposal. With the recent scholarship noted above, it appears that Paul's use of rhetoric is still continuing to be analyzed and discovered; therefore, the door should not be so hastily shut on the possibility of Paul's use of the present tense in this section as a literary device for vividness or historic present. As Lamp states, "This shift in tense adds vividness to the pathos of the passage ... Paul may very well be employing a literary *topos* here, the effect of which may be to heighten the emotional effect of the passage."

¹⁸ Morgan, 45. As Morgan notes, "Where [Paul] wants his argument to lead is clear in 8.2-3 – freedom from a law which, on account of dislocated human existence (flesh), could not help."

Chapter eight showcases the believer's life as a victorious existence that goes hand-in-hand with the fate of sin and the Law as disclosed in chapters six and seven. It is with this overarching focus on a hopeful Christian existence that one enters the exegesis of Romans 7.14-25.

IV. Pericope Analysis: Exegesis

¹⁴οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν: ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι, πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. ¹⁵ὃ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω: οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ. ¹⁶εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός. ¹⁷νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. ¹⁸οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἀγαθόν: τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ: ¹⁹οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τοῦτο πράσσω. ²⁰εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω [ἐγὼ] τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. ²¹Εὐρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλὸν ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται: ²²συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, ²³βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου. ²⁴ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος: τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; ²⁵χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοῖ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ, τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας.¹⁹

¹⁴*For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am fleshly, sold under sin.*

¹⁵*For what I do I know not. For not what I want, I practice; but what I hate, I do. ¹⁶But if what I want, not this I do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷But now it is no longer I doing it but the sin dwelling in me. ¹⁸For I know that no good thing dwells in me, this is in the flesh of me; for the want lies beside me, but not the doing good. ¹⁹For what good I want, I do not do, but what bad I want not, this I do. ²⁰But if what I want not, this I do, I no longer doing it but the sin dwelling in me. ²¹I find then the law, the wanting in me to do the good, that to me the bad lies beside. ²²For I rejoice in the law of God according to the inner man, ²³but I see another law in the members of me warring against the law of my mind and capturing me in the law of sin (the being in the members of me). ²⁴I am wretched man. Who will rescue me from the body of this death? ²⁵But*

¹⁹ E. Nestle, *Nestle-Aland 27th Edition Greek New Testament* (Oak Harbor, CA: Logos Research Systems, 1998), Romans 7:14-25.

*thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore I myself with the mind am a servant to the law of God, but with the flesh, I serve the law of sin.*²⁰

As theologians have struggled with this passage, many theories as to the identity of the “I” have been proposed.²¹ In performing a contextual exegesis on these Scriptures, the questions as ‘to whom this passage is addressed?’ and ‘what is this passage addressing’ must be asked. In analyzing the first two words of the passage, οἶδαμεν γὰρ (for we know), significant clues appear. The Greek word γὰρ (for) carries a strong emphasis of continuation²² which would indicate that 7.14 continues the train of thought established in 7.13.²³ If this thought were not built upon, it would at least be held in the forefront of the writer’s mind. As is typical of Paul, his continuation of thought is not just one verse deep. This is seen in the οὖν (therefore) at the beginning of verses 7.7 and 7.13. The Greek οὖν (therefore) normally indicates a summary of the preceding facts or conclusion of the preceding argument.²⁴ Paul is digging deeper and deeper into this

²⁰ The translation offered here is that of the author of this paper. It is noted that the translation does not ‘flow’ well; however, the purpose of this paper is not to provide a translation that proves a theological point but rather to perform a contextual exegesis on the Greek text itself in order to determine the identity of the “I.” Therefore, one attempted to provide a static, yet grammatically correct translation.

²¹ Middendorf, 15-51, 263. It is noted that Middendorf’s objective work on the modern scholarship concerning this subject was extremely helpful to the author of this paper. Through it, great insight was gained as to the position of many modern theologians. However, one would disagree with Middendorf’s personal conclusions. Through his semantics and pragmatics, Middendorf concludes, “It is because sin, which continues to dwell in the believer’s flesh and to work in his members (vv 14, 17, 20), is able to prohibit him from doing the “good” the Law requires and he desires. As long as the believer remains in this world, there is that within him, namely, his flesh which, corrupted by sin, also leads one to do the evil “I hate” (vv. 14-23) ... As a result, the content of what the “I” speaks in Romans 7:14-25 fits squarely within Paul’s view of the Christian life.” The subjects of indwelling sin and Paul’s eschatology will be examined later in this paper.

²² Hewett, 35. J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domain : Greek (New Testament)*, (Oak Harbor, CA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1996), γὰρ and J. P. Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), LN 89.23.

²³ J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Logos Library System electronic edition). Vol. 38A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 7.13-7.14.

²⁴ Hewett, 36. Swanson, οὖν and Louw, LN 89.50.

subject with the use of οὖν (therefore) and γὰρ (for). In chapter seven, 7.13 is a summary of the argument presented in 7.7-7.12 and the οὖν in 7.7 shows that 7.7-7.12 is connected to 7.1-7.6. Suffice it to say that all of chapter seven is held together as an overarching whole against whatever the independent intricacies of 7.7-25 seem to say.

But who is the ‘we’ of the οἶδαμενο (we know)? Building on the continuing nature of chapter seven, notice the ἀδελφοί, γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ (brethren, for I am speaking to those knowing the law) of 7.1²⁵. It would appear that these remarks are directed to the Jews or at least to those who practice the Law.²⁶ As Paul was a Jew, his understanding of someone ‘knowing the Law’ would have included more than just a person with some head knowledge.²⁷ To *know* something as holy and consecrated as God’s Law within Judaism would have included an intimate experiential relationship with the object. This would have required an active participation from the ‘knower’ that would have went far beyond the Greek’s objective and observable understanding of γινώσκω. Though the Greeks prided themselves on their seemingly

²⁵ For this section, it is noted that often the verbs οἶδα and γινώσκω were often used synonymously. For more on their usage and interchangeability see, Rudolf Bultmann, “γινώσκω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:690 and Heinrich Seesemann, “οἶδα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 5:116.

²⁶ Morgan, 45-46. This section will attempt to show how Paul is connecting himself with the Jews. In an effort to prove that the believer has died to the law, while maintaining that the law is holy and good and that sin is to blame, Morgan shows of Paul, “Instead of being negative about the Jewish Law ... Paul draws on a commonplace of human experience ... This allows Paul to be positive about God’s law while insisting on the need for redemption. The human will is trapped and needs the rescue which Christ and the Spirit bring.” Dunn, 7:14. Dunn asserts “that the plural resonates against a background of sympathy toward the law”; however, this section will attempt to show that solidarity is the goal of Paul.

²⁷ This is based upon the Hebrew word yāda in which one would have an experiential knowledge of the subject. John J. Davis, “The Patriarchs’ Knowledge of Jehovah: A Critical Monograph on Exodus 6:3,” *Grace Journal* vol. 4 #1 (Winter 1963): 29-43. In this article Davis shows how God was known to His people in the Old Testament by much more than just a name. In his exegetical work Davis notes, “The verb yāda is not only used to convey the idea of knowledge of a thing, but knowledge as a result of specific experience... its meaning goes far beyond a mere knowledge of facts. This verb is also used for knowledge when both revelation and experience are involved.” (40).

superior intelligence and their esoteric concept found in γινώσκω,²⁸ only a practicing Jew could claim to *know* the Law or to have this experiential knowledge. Only someone (like Paul) involved in an active relationship with the Law (past or present) would dare say that they *knew* the Law. One sees Paul building a bridge of solidarity with his fellow brethren as he was one who had known the Law within this context (cf. Phil 3.4-6, Gal 1.14).²⁹ Strategically, Paul calls these who know the Law his brethren at 7.1 and continues to link himself to these brethren with saying ἀδελφοί μου, ... ἵνα καρποφορήσωμεν (my brethren ... that we might bear fruit) in 7.4. Paul strengthens this connection over the next three sentences using first person plural verbs³⁰ until the very pivotal questions of 7.7, Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; (Therefore, what will we say? Is the law sin?). First person plural verbs have been used extensively throughout chapters 5 and 6;³¹ however, there are only five occurrences in all of chapter 7. It is not coincidental that Paul starts both sections (7.7 and 7.14) with a first person plural verb. Many theologians focus on the first person singular aorist in 7.7-13 and the first person singular present in 7.14-25; however, both sections begin with this first

²⁸ Bultmann, 1:692-696, Richard E. Oster Jr., “Christianity in Asia Minor,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:938-954. particularly the section on Christian Gnosticism on p. 948-949 and Kurt Rudolph, “Gnosticism,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:1033-1040. This esoteric nature of the term γινώσκω can clearly be seen in Gnosticism where Rudolph notes, “The gnostics understood themselves to be the elite “chosen people” who, in distinction from the “worldly-minded,” were able to perceive the delicate connection between world (cosmology), humanity (anthropology), and salvation (soteriology). The goal of gnostic teaching was that with the help of insight (*gnōsis*), the elect could be freed from the fetters of this world (spirit from matter, light from darkness) and so return to their true home in the Kingdom of Light—for that alone is the meaning of “salvation.” It is not a matter of deliverance from sin and guilt, as in orthodoxy, but of the freeing of the spirit from matter (*hyle*), in particular, the material human body.” (1033-1034)

²⁹ Moo, 448, 453. Moo agrees that Paul is using this section to connect with the Jews. Instead of emphasizing the ‘we know,’ Moo relies heavily on the context of this passage and the impossibility of a believer being ‘sold under sin.’ Moo does agree that the ‘we’ does “draw the readers of the letter into the argument” (453)

³⁰ ἦμεν in 7.5 and κατηγορήθημεν and κατειχόμεθα in 7.6

³¹ NRSV translates ‘we’ 30 times

person plural connection to Paul. It appears that Paul is strategically strengthening his bridge of solidarity with his brethren Jews while at the same time keeping the main thing in focus.

As shown above, the entirety of chapter 7 is connected and should be held together. Each section should not be analyzed independently. It does not appear that Paul is either beginning a new subject without remembering what he has said in the previous sentences or beginning to ramble or digress in middle of an argument.³² The section of 7.7-13 answers the critical question, ‘Is the law sin?’³³ Paul has danced around this topic in the previous sections, but now engages this problem head on.³⁴ Paul says that to call the Law sin would be foolish, because it is God’s Law – it is holy, just as God is holy. However, the Law and sin are connected. Sin has used the Law to bring death, but all that involved the Law was not negative. Through sin using the Law, the Law was able to expose sin for what it was – sin. Sin could not remain hidden or dormant; the Law was like a floodlight turned on sin showing it for what it really was.

As shown above, Paul’s language clearly and cleverly connects 7.1-6 to 7.7-13 while the narrative context shows that a reader would have been carried through this

³² C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*. vol. 6, *Black’s New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Henry Chadwick (London, England: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 131. This would counter the opinion of Barrett where he states of Romans 7.7-25, “Paul makes what is strictly speaking a digression from the main line of his thought.” Dunn, 7:14. Dunn asserts, “Paul is beginning his argument that there is a duality both in the law (law—sin, and law—Spirit), and in himself as a typical believer (flesh—sin, and mind—Spirit ...), and that these two dualities are mutually complementary (flesh—law—sin; mind—law—Spirit).” However, all this splitting appears to completely lose the focus of Paul’s argument about the Law’s role in the Old Life.

³³ Barret, 131, 137-144. It would appear that Barrett actually makes this the pivotal question. By doing this, it allows Barrett to overemphasize the contrast between the law and flesh in Romans 7.14-25.

³⁴ Morgan, 27. As Morgan noted of the second chapter of Romans, “Paul is treading so carefully that it is hard to doubt that what he has to say about the law lies at the heart of this epistle. It keeps cropping up, without being handled directly and thematically as yet.”

entire story beginning at chapter five.³⁵ After the first four chapters in which Paul has argued the case for justification by faith, a transition occurs. The focus shifts to the ethical implications based upon this reality. Paul initiates this transition by spotlighting that this truth of justification by faith is afforded by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here Paul starts with the pivotal contrast between Adam and Christ, where Adam represents the Old Age (characterized by sin, death and the Law) and Christ represents the New Age (characterized by freedom, life, and the Spirit).³⁶ While Paul focuses on Christ's death, he is setting up the debate over the connection between the Law and sin and death. Chapter six builds upon this idea of the New Age by exploring the benefits received through the believer's participation in Christ's death.³⁷ With the problems proposed by 5.20-21,³⁸ Paul shows first that the believer has died to sin; whereas, chapter seven continues this line of thought by showing that the believer has also died to the Law. The continuity of this entire section cannot be stressed enough. Paul's argument and subject is consistent and flows well. The audience is one who knows the Law and the focus is the contrast between the Old Life and the New Life.³⁹

One sees this contrast emphasized when Paul says in 7.14, ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν· ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι, πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (the law is spiritual; but I am fleshly, sold under sin). As the beginning remark of this

³⁵ Lamp, 1-16 and Morgan, 35-49. This section and the following paragraphs attempt to show Paul's continuity of Christian existence as hopeful. For a detailed analysis of the narrative context and the new life verses old life theory as pertaining to Paul's use of rhetorical contrasts in chapters five through eight, see Lamp's paper.

³⁶ Morgan, 44. Morgan notes the starting of this theme beginning in chapter five and "the full unfolding of the new life in Christ as life in the Spirit follows in ch. 8. It will take up and develop themes introduced in 5.1-11 and is clearly the climax of this section of the epistle (chs. 5-8)."

³⁷ Morgan, 40-43. Morgan specifically notes, "Christ's death and resurrection both motivate and empower the Christian moral life." (42)

³⁸ Dunn, 7:7.

³⁹ Morgan, 46. Morgan agrees with this by asserting that the purpose of this passage, "was surely contrasting life lived under the law with the new life in the Spirit (7.6)."

controversial passage, this comment strengthens the continuity of these sections rather than dividing it from all that preceded.⁴⁰ The focus is the Law's role in the Old Life;⁴¹ however, as some scholars study the contrast between the spiritual and the flesh, they begin to focus on the ἐγὼ (I am) instead of the Law.⁴² As σάρκινός may be interpreted as a neutral substance (just the physical flesh of human being), here it is associated with ἁμαρτίαν (sin) and apparently contrasted to πνευματικός (spiritual), which tends to give this use of σάρκινός a negative slant; thereby, accounting for its interpretation as 'fleshly' or 'carnal'.⁴³ However, remembering 1) the connection in 7.5 of 'in the flesh' to a person under the Law (a pre-believer), 2) the statement of 7.6 where Paul says that believers are slaves to the New Life of the Spirit and not the Old Life of the Law, and 3)

⁴⁰ J. Ayodeji Adewuya, "The Holy Spirit and Sanctification in Romans 8.1-17," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2001): 74-75 and Moo, 445. In noting the continuity of the sections, one notices that the law is spiritual, yet the person engaged in a battle with sin and the Law without any assistance from the Holy Spirit. This would directly contrast the life in the Spirit discussed in Romans eight. As Adewuya notes this lack of Spirit aid he writes, "For Paul, the Christian life is not to be lived by one's efforts and strength. Rather, Paul is about to show that an adequate provision for Christian living is to be seen in the Person, presence and power of the Holy Spirit." (74) He goes on to support this by showing connection of the πνεύμα language of chapter eight to 7.6

⁴¹ Middendorf, 185-225, 242, Moo, 443. Moo states, "Paul's essential teaching about the inability of the Mosaic law to rescue sinful people from spiritual bondage is the same whether that bondage is the condition of the unregenerate person – who cannot be saved through the law – or that of the regenerate person – who cannot be sanctified and ultimately delivered from the influence of sin through the law." (443) Middendorf appears in complete contradiction to this statement with his conclusion succinctly stated, "verses 14-25 do not discuss the role of the Law in the life of an unbeliever."

⁴² Dunn, 7.14, Barrett, 128-129, 131, 137-39. Though Barrett warns against this trap of overemphasizing the "I am", it appears that he is guilty of the crime. Barrett uses many scriptures in an attempt to show that at 7.5 Paul has two meanings for flesh; whereby, he asserts that "Christians are both in and not in the flesh, just as they are both sinful and free from sin" (129). By applying the negative sense of the flesh to 7.14, Barrett is able to insist that "Sin has dominion over me ... This dominion is given vivid rhetorical expression in the next verses." By splitting the flesh, Barrett continues by separating the "I" and the flesh in 7.18 "emphasize the distinction between the true self – 'I' – and the sin-dominated flesh." However, there is no duality of "I" or of flesh seen in 7.5 or 7.14-25. Paul indicates by using the imperfect active ἦμεν in 7.5 in conjunction with 7.6 that this was a past condition (For when *we were* in the flesh) while the section of 7.14-25 gives no indication that Paul was trying to split the "I" of the flesh. Dunn, 7.14 exemplifies the typical follower of Luther's thought by stating, "With this verse the reference of the ἐγὼ broadens out from that of everyman expressed in terms of the "once upon a time" Adam to that of everyman in the present (ἐμὶ). With the transition from past to present the note of personal existential involvement immediately becomes sharper"

⁴³ H. Seebass, "Flesh," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols. Edited by Colin Brown, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3: 671-678 and Moo, 453-454.

the absolute and positive affirmation of 7.12 that the Law is holy, one would question if the purpose of this section was to emphasize the struggles between the Law and the sinful flesh.⁴⁴ The focus has been the futility of seeking justification through the Law. This section, 7.14-25, accentuates the frustration of those under bondage to the Law in the position of the Old Age.

This emphasis on the Law intensifies the contrast of the Old Age to the New Age. One of the characteristics of the New Age is that the believer has died to the Law.⁴⁵ Paul was trying to show those who were still bound to or living in the Old Age that 1) the Law has been used by sin, 2) the Law has exposed sin, and 3) the Law cannot be fulfilled without the New Life in the Spirit.⁴⁶ The Law is spiritual – that cannot be denied; however, it is part of the Old Age. The requirements of the Law can never be satisfied by human effort alone.⁴⁷ Though the sincerest effort may be applied, the work will always come up short. This is why Paul has emphasized justification by faith not by works throughout this letter. However, only by participating in the death and resurrection of Christ can anyone be free from the Law and its requirements, because it is spiritual – it is holy and just and good – it must be fulfilled. The only way a person can fulfill the requirements of the Law is by being ‘in Christ’.⁴⁸ This section, 7.14-25, is clearly

⁴⁴ Lamp, 10-11, Middendorf, 243, Moo 454, and Morgan, 45. Middendorf apparently wrong focus can be seen when he states, “Paul is portraying the “double effect” which the Law has upon him as a believer who is actively engaged in the struggle against his own sinful flesh”

⁴⁵ Morgan, 43.

⁴⁶ Adewuya, 77.

⁴⁷ W.T. Purkiser, *Exploring Christian Holiness*. 3 vols. 1. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1983), 142.

⁴⁸ Adewuya, 77. In explaining the ethical dimension of life in the Spirit according to Romans eight Adewuya states, “What could never be accomplished in the power of the flesh – fulfilling the righteous demands of the law (v. 3) – is now possible through the power of the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit, Christians share the result of Christ’s victory and are able to do the good things the law really wanted.”

describing someone who is a slave to the Law.⁴⁹ This is emphasized by the ἐγὼ being ‘sold under sin’ (7.14).⁵⁰ The phrase ‘sold under sin’ carries the implication of being a slave. In describing the New Life, Paul has already said that those in Christ are free from sin (cf. 6.2, 6, 11, 18-22)⁵¹ and free from the Law (cf. 7.1-6).⁵² Directly in 7.6, Paul clearly states that believers are no longer slaves to the law but to the New Life of the Spirit. The entire emphasis of chapter six that sinning is incompatible with the Christian life supports this.⁵³ This condition of being a slave to sin is not a benefit of Christian existence.⁵⁴ With Paul’s strong ethical expectations set forth in chapter six, it appears inconceivable to associate the ethical situation of 7.14-25 with a believer’s existence.

Theories as to how a believer may be ‘sold under sin’ can be found. Advocates would look to such phrases as 7.20b οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκουῖσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία (I no longer doing it but the sin dwelling in me) and 7.23b

⁴⁹ Morgan, 44-45. This condition is a complete contrast to 7.6 where Morgan notes, “these verses are now widely understood in the light of 7.6 as describing the old, pre-Christian existence under the law – not as it appeared to Paul at the time, but as it appears to him now. The ‘I’ is more general than autobiographical.”

⁵⁰ Moo, 454 and Morgan, 45. Moo points back to 3.9 where, “Paul summarizes his teaching about people outside Christ by asserting that they are all “under sin.”” This view is enforced by Morgan where he says, “In v.14 this ‘I’ is said to be sold under the power of Sin, and in view of the account of Christian existence in ch. 6 as freedom from sin that must surely signify pre-Christian existence.”

⁵¹ Moo, 445, Purkiser, 142

⁵² Morgan, 43.

⁵³ Lamp, 7.

⁵⁴ Jon Zens, ““When We Were in the Flesh”: Should Rom 7:7ff Shape the Christian’s Self Image,” *Baptist Reformation Review* 10 no 4 (1981): 13-21. In his article, Zens makes some practical observations about Christian existence. Though he is a self-proclaimed Calvinist, Zens reflects, “*How we view ourselves* obviously has the utmost of practical effects in our Christian experience.” (13) He goes on to explain how the negative or positive self-image of a believer affects their benefit to the Kingdom here on earth. He notes, “Historically, theological traditions that view Rom. 7 as *normal, inevitable Christian experience* have produced people with essentially negative self concepts ... I have come to the conclusion that Rom. 7 describes *pre-Christian, in the flesh, and under law* existence.” (14) His study goes on to contrast being “in the flesh” with being “in Christ.” He notes that Romans 7.5 is of the utmost importance in interpreting the following passages showing that 8.8 “states that those “in the flesh” cannot please God and that Christians are “in the Spirit” in 8.9 and that “The “now” [of 7.6] indicates life in Christ in stark contrast to life “in the flesh” (7:5).” (16) His implications include, “If the experience Paul describes in Rom. 7:7ff. takes place “in the flesh” (7:5), then it is wrong and misleading to direct the Christian to the negative, defeated outlook delineated in this section.”

καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου
(and capturing me in the law of sin (the being in the members of me)) for support.⁵⁵

However, just as a believer cannot be sold under sin, neither can they have sin dwelling within them. Humanity has labored long and hard in trying to explain the origins of sin⁵⁶; however, the Bible remains focused on “affirming the reality of sin, the need of repentance, and divine promise of redemption.”⁵⁷ Some may cling to the concept that sin must continually dwell within the flesh;⁵⁸ however, this does not appear to be a Pauline perspective on sin.⁵⁹ To Paul, sin was a tyrant, a power which dominated and destroyed.⁶⁰ Remembering that the main argument of chapter seven was that the law

⁵⁵ David S. Dockery, “Romans 7:14-25: Pauline Tension in the Christian Life,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 no 2 (Fall 1981): 239-257. In this article, Dockery details the main views on this passage. His own view is summed up, “The genitival construction leaves no doubt that the “law” in v 22 refers to the Mosaic law. The “other law” (v 23) is equated with the “law of sin” (v 23) or the sin principle. This verse along with the present tenses, is a most deciding factor in determining the identification of “I” in this context as Paul in his regenerate experience.” (250) Dockery goes on to expound on the indwelling sin principle and concludes, “The text is gripped with tension. It paints for the readers a picture of the Christian life with all its anguish and its simultaneous hopefulness. This is the struggle with which the Christian is involved throughout his life. Deliverance is promised, but it is an eschatological hope.” (254)

⁵⁶ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 73, 75. Randy Maddox notes that this is especially evident in the different emphases of the Eastern and Western Churches. “Western Christians typically place greatest emphasis on the dimension of the sinner’s obligations to others (especially God), and the guilt that our sinful acts acquire from breaching these obligations. Eastern theology has focused attention more on the dimension of the sinner per se; in particular, the infirmity of our nature that results from (and becomes the source of) our actual sins.” (73) Maddox traces the roots of John Wesley’s doctrine of ‘In-Being Sin’ and its need for ‘therapeutic healing’ to these Eastern tendencies where “[Wesley had a] life-long conviction that God deals responsibly with each individual. This conviction led him to locate the issue of guilt in our own sins rather than the sin of our ancestors.”(75)

⁵⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 135.

⁵⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul To The Romans. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 151. Bruce asserts that Romans 7.14-25 shows that the believer “lives in two worlds simultaneously.” He maintains that the person in this passage “is a man living simultaneously on two planes, eagerly longing to live a life in keeping with the higher plane, but sadly aware of the strength of indwelling sin that keeps on pulling him down to the lower plane.”

⁵⁹ Maddox, 82. John Wesley countered against this concept of continual indwelling sin. Randy Maddox asserts John Wesley’s belief to be “that Inbeing Sin’s corruption pervades every human faculty and power, leaving us utterly unable to save ourselves. Fortunately, however, God the Great Physician can heal our diseased nature.”

⁶⁰ Adewuya, class notes and Morgan, 40.

could not justify and was unable to set a person free, grace has been asserted as the solution to the problem.⁶¹ Grace has the power to set people free and salvation is freedom from sin; therefore, grace and sin are incompatible.⁶² Where grace abounds, sin cannot remain. To say that sin must continue to indwell in the believer is to say that God's saving grace is ineffectual and that no regeneration occurs when a person submits themselves to Christ.⁶³

Some would set forth that a believer's struggle with sin can be found in Paul's eschatology. Looking specifically at 7.24, *ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος: τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου* (I am wretched man. Who will rescue me from the body of this death?) notice the contrast between the present tense *ἐγὼ* and the future tense of *ῥύσεται*. If the "I" were interpreted to be a believer, then it would appear that the current state will be rescued in a future time. But does this imply that sin continues to hold some mystical power over Christians in their current existence?⁶⁴ The Christian does live in an already-not yet tension where there are two

⁶¹ Purkiser, 133. In his comments on Romans chapter five, Purkiser notes, "Grace reverses what sin produces ... God's purpose is to cancel in Christ all the consequences of Adam's sin – replacing sin with righteousness, death with eternal life."

⁶² Adewuya, class notes.

⁶³ Bruce, 153. This completely contradicts Bruce where he comments on 7.14, "The law is 'spiritual' because it is God's law; but this nature of mine is unspiritual (*sarkinos*, 'fleshly'), enslaved to a power which my will repudiates. There is something in man – even regenerate man – which objects to God and seeks to be independent of Him; this 'something' is what Paul here calls his 'flesh' (cf. verse 18), a prey to the tyranny of indwelling sin." However, this cannot be true because of the fact that grace and sin are incompatible. It is inconceivable that both grace and sin can reign in the believer.

⁶⁴ Schreiner, 390-391. Schreiner would answer this question yes as he writes, "I would suggest that the arguments are so finely balanced because Paul does not intend to distinguish believers from unbelievers in this test ... 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... The specific tests 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."

worlds – this present world and the believer’s future home.⁶⁵ However, while the believer does live in a fallen world and is susceptible to the temptations to sin, they are not forced to yield.⁶⁶ To say that sin must continue to reign in a believer’s life is to make a mockery of the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

This freedom from the Law and sin does not free believers from the temptation to sin.⁶⁷ Paul adamantly warns those who have been liberated from sin to be on guard (cf. 6.12-13). The believer has died to sin; however, sin is not dead.⁶⁸ This is also part of the

⁶⁵ Jan Lambrecht, “The Right Things You Want To Do: A Note on Galatians 5,17d,” *Biblica* 79 no 4 (1998): 515-524. In this article, Lambrecht studies the problematic section of Galatians 5.16-18. Pertinent to this study, he compares this section to Romans 7. Lambrecht affirms that the “I” of Romans 7 is of pre-conversion status and shows how this unconverted “I” struggles with his ‘wants’ in regards to good and evil.

⁶⁶ Dunn, 7.24 – 7.25, Lamp, 7, 13 and Middendorf, 224. This would go directly against Dunn who asserts that the Old Age and the New Age overlap. Here he explains that 7.24 shows “the eschatological tension of being caught between the two epochs of Adam and Christ, of death and life” where “The deliverance in view here therefore is not likely to be conversion, expressed in the decisive acceptance of 5:1 ... , but final deliverance, which is the completion of the good work already begun (Phil 1:6).” Dunn goes on to say of 7.25b, “Many commentators fail to appreciate the eschatological tension fundamental to Paul’s understanding of the process of salvation. They judge that Paul must be speaking here of life in the old epoch, and therefore life before faith, life under the law as γράμμα ... Paul is speaking of life in the old epoch of Adam in this section, but since that epoch runs through till death (5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–26) believers perforce still belong to it, “in the flesh,” “mortal bodies.”” Dunn appears to use this eschatological tension as support for asserting that there is a duality of the Law and the flesh described in this section, which allows sin to continue to reign in the believer’s life until death. As Dunn states of the believer in his explanation of verse fourteen, ““I” belong to this world, to the old epoch which is to pass; my dependency on the appetites of this mortal body yet continues. As such “I” am still within sin’s power, my slavery to sin unbroken; as such “I” am still sin’s chattel, sin can have its way with me.” Middendorf, who seems to lean heavily on Dunn’s interpretation of Paul’s eschatology, supports Dunn stating, “Paul’s view of the Christian life allows Romans 7:14-25 to be understood as a presentation of the continued, but embattled, influence of the sinful flesh in the Christian’s life ... So the “I” in Romans 7:14-25 can only be representing the Spirit-renewed mind or will of a believer who strives, in accordance with God’s Law, to refrain from evil and to do good.” Lamp counters these opinions of sin continuing to dominate in the overlap of ages by saying of chapter six “the ultimate expression of this freedom from sin is available only in the eschatological gift of eternal life in the last day. While this is certainly true in a theological sense, it misses Paul’s point in a rhetorical sense. Paul is arguing for transference from one humanity to another.”(7) Lamp continues, “Jesus Christ is identified as the antidote to the life lived under the Law, which is characterized as in subjection to sin (v. 25b) ... The conflict so vividly described in 7:7-25, especially in vv. 14-25, is remedied in Christ.”(13) One would add that as Christ died to sin once, so does the believer through regeneration in the conversion experience. There must be a clean break of the slavery to sin between the Old Age and the New Age. Sin does not continue to dominate once a person has submitted their life to Christ.

⁶⁷ Adewuya, 79. As Adewuya points out, “Paul does not negate the natural desires; instead he urges believers to bring them under the control of the Spirit.”

⁶⁸ Adewuya, 84. In his conclusion of the believer’s life in the Spirit according to Romans eight Adewuya writes, “The Holy Spirit is the answer to the problem of the Christian’s ‘body of death’, a body

Christian paradox where the believer is freed into slavery. When the believer dies to sin and the Law, they are free. However, this is not freedom *from* God, this is freedom *to* God. Christians becomes love-slaves to God and are only free to do what pleases God.⁶⁹ This is emphasized with the slavery metaphor of 7.6 where the believer is now a slave to the New Life of the Spirit. An element of slavery is obedience which requires that a person submit. A person may be called a slave; however, only if they are willfully serving their master are they *being* a slave. Throughout chapter six, Paul has encouraged believers by telling them that they do not have to submit to sin. Christians do not have to yield their members (6.13), they can overcome the temptations and not let sin reign in their lives. Paul continually admonishes them to live out this Christian reality – to become what they are. Believers are freed from the Old Life in order to live the New Life which is accomplished by ‘walking according to the Spirit’ (8.4).

dominated by sin and dead with respect to producing any work which is righteous, according to the definition of the Law of God ... The unbeliever can live only according to the flesh by which he/she is enslaved. The Christian has a choice. The Christian can live in the realm of the flesh or in the realm of the Spirit.”

⁶⁹ Paul R. Raabe, “The Law and Christian Sanctification: A Look at Romans,” *Concordia Journal* 22 April (1996): 178-185. Raabe appears to disagree with this thinking. In his article, Raabe addresses sanctification by focusing on Romans 8:1-4 and Romans 13:8-10. According to Raabe, people cannot keep the Ten Commandments and even if they could, keeping “the commandments does not contribute in any way to their relationship with God”(179). Raabe insists that the law is “fulfilled in us, not by us” (180). By loving others as yourself, the law is satisfied because the “you shall nots” (181) of the law are equated to the “you shall love”(181). Raabe continues with citing from Romans 7:14-25 that, “Christians are still sinners”(183); therefore, the law reveals the battle inside the believer between the new mind and the flesh. Yet because of the new mind, the believer wants to obey and delights in God’s holy law. Finally, in the conclusion Raabe continues to emphasize the weakness of man’s ability to adhere to the Ten Commandments, the sovereignty of God and the Creed’s ability to bring justification to the believer. As a Wesleyan-Pentecostal, I disagree with Raabe’s dismissal of the Christian’s participation as part of sanctification. Raabe implies that “cheap grace” is all-sufficient which seems to be a dangerous position. Salvation is not just a positional change – it is a practical change. Because of what God has done, there are things that the Christian should do.

V. Summary

Many theologians attempt to produce doctrines based upon their own experiences. For many years, the lament of the ‘wretched man’ in Romans 7.14-25 has comforted many people as they yield to various temptations to sin. However, the life of constant defeat shown in this passage is completely contrary to the believer’s New Life as portrayed in chapters five through eight. Specifically Romans 6.1-7.6 shows that believers are free from sin and the Law through their participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within the immediate context and its focus on the Law, the passage of 7.14-25 emphasizes the plight of searching for justification without faith and highlights the frustration of seeking freedom by the Law. Based upon Paul’s extensive use of literary devices in his rhetorical writings and the bridge of solidarity that he was extending to the Jews, it appears that Paul used the present tense “I” in an effort to strengthen his solidarity with the Jews and for its dramatic effect. Paul is emphasizing the struggle with sin and with being under the Law before gaining victory ‘in Christ’. Unfortunately, many people do not want to hear that they can live without sin; however, it is inaccurate to use the passage of 7.14-25 to validate an unrighteous lifestyle. ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ (7.25) that Christians are not allowed to wallow in sin, but rather challenged and encouraged through Paul’s writing to live within their hopeful Christian existence because they are no longer condemned to a life of struggling with sin.

VI. Appropriation – Application: Expository Sermon

Theme Sentence: God’s answer to the Law and Sin was Freedom by Grace.

Subject: Christian Existence According to Romans 7:14-25

Title: Hopeful Living

Scripture: Romans 7:14-25

Description of Audience: A typical Sunday morning Southern rural Pentecostal congregation that averages an attendance of one hundred. The majority are well-versed in the scriptures and very knowledgeable regarding biblical matters.

Goals of Sermon: To present a biblical interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 which urges believers to pursue a holy lifestyle while also offering scriptural support for hopeful Christian existence

I. Introduction:

Has there ever been a time when you were greatly confused; I mean a time when all you could do is shake your head and wonder ‘What Happened?’ Like for instance: A time when a spark of sheer genius, something only on the level of Albert Einstein’s thinking came to your mind. And this idea was so perfect that you knew it had to be carried out. There was no stopping it. It was like a snow ball rolling down a steep hill just growing larger and gathering more momentum as time passed by. It just couldn’t be stopped. The great wheels of the cosmos had gone into motion and this perfect plan to be executed. And so you go through with this plan. However, the ending result is not at all what you had in mind.

Early in my marriage my wife and I were struggling as many young couples do. We were renting an extremely small house and trying to save money any way we could. Since we lived in the same city with our parents, we would often use their stuff instead of buying our own. One thing that we would borrow was my mom’s vacuum cleaner. I was kind of a neat freak so we were always driving across town, getting the vacuum cleaner, vacuuming the house, then taking it back. I was often inconveniencing my wife by saying, ‘Honey, while you are over that way, think you can go by mom’s and pick up the vacuum cleaner.’ Needless to say this became a source of frustration to my wife as this continued on for about four months. One day we happened to enter the mall through Sears and right there at the entrance was a line of brand new vacuum cleaners. All styles and sizes were standing there at full attention. I declare my wife started to drool. Okay, so was I but I declare the way she was looking at them was illegal in eight states. While she was gawking at them, I was struck by an amazing stroke of brilliance. I said, ‘Honey, you know how much we’ve been saving, so if you want your own vacuum cleaner, go ahead and pick one out.’ Well you would have thought we were at a drag-racing event the way she tore out of there. She started weighing them, reading about their functions, checking their prices, trying them out. All the while, I am hanging back just waiting. The train of my brilliant plan is rolling and gaining momentum in my mind. Finally she

comes to her decision. They have all been weighed and measured and she has declared a winner. She says, 'I want this one.' The locomotive in my mind has reached full steam and I throw open my arms and say 'Happy Birthday!' You see, her birthday was only a few days away and I thought I could kill two birds with one stone; get a vacuum cleaner and a birthday present at the same time. Well let me tell you, that train was instantly derailed. I was an ignorant young husband. I didn't know that it would be an insult to give something to be used for cleaning as a gift. She looked at me with that look, 'Are you on dope?' and says 'You think this is going to be my birthday present.' She then proceeded to give me an education on what are proper and appropriate gifts and how gifts should pamper or indulge your wife, not call them to work. What I thought was the perfect plan turned out to be a complete flop. I had expected to receive a bounty of love; however, instead I received scorn and frustration. Needless to say, we purchased the vacuum cleaner that day and my wife got a 'real' birthday present a few days later.

I stood there completely confused and bewildered wondering 'What Just Happened Here?' Here we have a beautiful example of a text that causes many people to scratch their head and say 'What Just Happened Here?' In reading through Romans, here near the middle of the book we find a theological nightmare which has become a stumbling block to many. Today we will try to answer this question of 'What Just Happened Here?' In order to do that, let's look first at Paul's focus up to this point.

II. What is Paul talking about? Freedom from the Law

A. Build the context

1. Romans has historically been an important book and inspired many great revivals
 - (i) Martin Luther – Reformation – the 'just shall live by faith'
 - (ii) Luther said most valuable book – read every day – the more you read the better it taste
 - (iii) Augustine – reading Romans one day – heard little girl say "take and read" – Romans changed his life
 - (iv) John Wesley – at Aldersgate he heard Luther's preface to Romans – just the preface – and said 'my heart was strangely warmed'
2. Romans is powerful in content
 - (i) Paul stresses the importance of faith in one's relationship with God
 - (ii) Paul continually contrast faith to the Law

B. The Law

1. This is a theme which the Jews would have been sensitive to
 - (i) The Law is a major focus of chapters 1-7
 - (ii) The Jews are a primary target of chapters 1-7
2. The Jews found their identity in their religion
 - (i) they were the 'chosen of God'
 - (ii) they were 'called out'

C. The Problem

1. The Jews shifted focus
 - (i) Went from finding salvation through their relationship with God
 - (ii) To finding salvation through following the commandments

2. Example: Reminds me of the country song ‘I was looking for love in all the wrong places – looking for love in too many faces’
 3. Paul exposes their false pride in the Law
 4. Paul details the Law’s inability to provide justification
- D. It is all about relationship
1. God wanted them to look for love in His face
 2. To find freedom in His arms
 3. To have an active dynamic relationship with Him
 4. Not a static cold observance of the Law
- E. Paul declares what the Law was ineffective to do has now been done through the blood of Jesus Christ
1. Example:
 - (i) Baseball gives us a good analogy of this scenario. In baseball the goal is to get to first base. When standing in the batter’s box, we really want to get to first. But if we want to get to first, we *can’t* look toward first. If we do, then the pitcher will throw the ball right by us and we will be out. We must focus all our energy on hitting the ball.
 - (ii) In a sense the “righteous requirements” of the Law are first base to us. We still want to get there just as the Jews did. But the Jews were doing just what many of us are guilty of, focusing our attention on first base—and constantly strike out! What Paul is saying is that we must keep our eye on the ball—on Jesus Himself— on our relationship with God and then we will discover that we arrive on first base (a righteous life) without even trying.⁷⁰

III. What has Paul stressed? Freedom from Sin

- A. The Law could not free a person from sin
 1. God looks at a person’s heart
 2. Sin is not erased by works
- B. Grace was God’s answer for sin
 1. Old Life verses New Life
 - (i) 7.1-6 – those in Christ are free from the Law
 - (ii) 6.6 – old self = body of sin
 - (iii) 6.6 – new self = died with Christ = body of sin destroyed
- C. Sin and Grace cannot co-exist
 1. To Paul sin was a tyrant, a power which dominated and destroyed
 2. Grace has been asserted as the solution to the problem
 3. Where grace abounds, sin cannot remain
 4. Example: oil and water don’t mix
- D. The believer is not entrenched in a battle which they can never win
 1. 6.10 – Christ died to sin once for all
 2. 6.2 and 6.6-7 – whoever has died is free from sin
 3. To say that a believer must continue struggling with sin is to make a mockery of the blood of Jesus

⁷⁰ Lawrence Richards, “Study Guide 126, Romans 7-8,” *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books: 1987).

IV. What does this mean? Freedom to be a slave of God

- A. Follow the story (7.22)
 - 1. Freed from sin
 - 2. 7.22 – Enslaved to God
- B. To whom are you pledging your allegiance
 - 1. Sin
 - 2. The Law – works
 - 3. God
 - 4. Example: Story of a love-slave
 - (i) It is one thing to be a slave and yet another to be an obedient slave. In the time of Romans, slavery was a fact of life and it was not always a bad thing. Many times people could not pay their debts; therefore, they would sell themselves into slavery. They would submit themselves to a master. The master would take care of the slave. Room and board and sometimes even pay would be exchanged for service. Sometimes after or during service, the slave would do something very dramatic. They would decide to become a love slave. They were no longer bound by duty as they forfeited any rights and willingly chose to become a slave of the master. To signify this they would allow the master to nail their earlobe to the doorpost. Thus they were marked for life and all could see the outward symbol of an inward expression of ‘I love my master’. Slavery moved from operating out of duty to love.

V. Conclusion:

Romans 7.14-25 has historically been a difficult passage for Bible readers to interpret. Upon a casual or quick reading, it appears that Paul is simply identifying with what we call life. As humans, we do not like admitting failure or defeat. Therefore, it is comforting to use this passage as an excuse. ‘It’s not my fault – even Paul wasn’t perfect – see here he continually struggled with doing the wrong thing even when he wanted to do good’. But a detailed look at the context and understanding Paul’s use of rhetorical devices, how he was writing and framing this letter for his audience of his day, shows that this passage cannot be used as an excuse to live an unholy lifestyle. The blood of Jesus is much too precious to be trampled on like. The believer has died to sin; however, sin is not dead. We must continue to live in our newfound freedom *to* God. As Romans 7.6 maintains,

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

And

Ephesians 5.8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

If you find yourself hopeless today, I pray that find life in overpowering victorious Christian existence as presented by Paul. Let Christ set you free today that you may be freed from the Old Life in order to live the New Life by ‘walking according to the Spirit’ (8.4).

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