

Chafer Theological Seminary Annual Pastor's Conference

Romans 7 and Sanctification

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March 7-9, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will argue that one's understanding of practical sanctification is profoundly impacted by how one views the "I" in Romans 7:7-25. Specifically, the paper will argue that the "I" in Romans 7 is Paul, and in verses 14-25 Paul is reflecting upon his post conversion experience. In addition, the paper will maintain that a post conversion view of Romans 7:14-25 leads to a dual nature view of the believer. This view teaches that although the believer has a new nature that he received at conversion, his Adamic nature still exists within him and continues to tempt him to return to his former sinful lifestyle throughout the course of this life. Finally, the paper will contend that viewing believers through the lenses of the dual nature view shapes one's understanding of practical sanctification in several important ways.

WHO IS THE SPEAKER IN ROMANS 7:7-25?

Who is the subject or speaker of Romans 7:7-25? Three options have been proposed.¹ First, some have proposed the theory of the Rhetorical "I". According to this view, the pronoun "I" in Romans 7:7-25 serves as a literary device that depicts all of humanity. Thus, the "I" is not autobiographical but rather represents the experience of everyone. Second, others have proposed the theory of the Representative "I". According to this view, the pronoun "I" in Romans 7:7-25 depicts the life experience of a representative figure that is typical of every person including the speaker. For example, the "I" of Romans 7:7-25 could represent the experience of Adam at the time of the fall. According to this view, in Romans 7:7-25, Paul is identifying his own experience with the historical event of the fall. In other words, the "I" should be taken as Paul in solidarity with Adam. Moreover, the "I" might also represent the people of Israel at the time of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. In other words, the "I" represents Paul in solidarity with Israel.

The Representative "I" view has merit due to the fact that it is elsewhere in scripture. For example, it is found in the Old Testament (Psalm 22, 51, 130), in Paul (Romans 3:7, 11:19, 1Corinthians 13:11-12), and in the 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.² Third, still others have suggested the theory of the Autobiographical "I". According to this view, the "I" depicts the speaker only as the subject. In other words, the "I" of Romans 7:7-25 depicts only Paul's own personal experience.

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.³ Thus, the autobiographical "I" or representative "I" views best explain the usage of "I" in Romans 7:7-25. Whether these verses reflect Paul's experience only or his experience in solidarity with that of another is debatable. At any rate, it is apparent that Paul's personal experiences are reflected in Romans 7:7-25.

¹ John D. Grassmick, *Romans 7:7-25: Who Is The "I"?* Class hand out from "Exegesis of Romans" October 16, 2001, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, 1-3.

² John D. Grassmick, Class notes from "Exegesis of Romans" October 16, 2001, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, 92.

³ Grassmick, *Romans 7:7-25: Who Is The "I"?*, 3.

DOES ROMANS 7:14-25 PORTRAY PAUL'S PRECONVERSION OR POST CONVERSION EXPERIENCE?

Assuming that Romans 7:14-25 reflects Paul's personal experience, the next question that must be answered is do these verses portray Paul's pre conversion or post conversion experience?

Arguments Supporting A Pauline Pre Conversion Experience in Romans 7:14-25

According to the "pre conversion" or "unregenerate view," Romans 7:14-25 reflects Paul's experiences prior to his conversion to Christianity. Proponents of this view advance several arguments in support of their position.

Paul's Bondage to Sin Favors the Pre Conversion View

The first argument supporting the notion that Paul is speaking of his pre conversion experience in Romans 7:14-25 involves the personal bondage to sin depicted in these verses. Back in Romans 6, Paul explained that believers are no longer slaves to sin because of their union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. As a result of this union, believers must no longer resubmit themselves to sin as their master (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22). In Romans 8, Paul further explains that believers have been liberated from sin through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:2).

Conversely, in Romans 7:23, Paul explains that he is a captive to the law of sin dwelling within him. In Romans 7:25, he explains his need to be delivered from his body of death. In Romans 7:18, he indicates that nothing good dwells within him. In Romans 7:14 he calls himself unspiritual or carnal (RSV). He then claims that he is under sin (*upo thn amartian, upo tēn hamartian*). Paul typically uses negative *upo* phrases to describe unbelievers. For example, in Romans 3:9, he says that both Jews and Greek are "under sin." In Galatians 3:10, he states that those who rely upon works are "under a curse." In Galatians 3:22, he maintains that scripture has shut up all "under sin." In Galatians 3:22, 25 he says that before faith in Christ arrived "all people were under a pedagogue." In Galatians 4:2, he states that before the age of maturity people are "under guardians and managers." In Galatians 4:3, he claims that unbelievers are "enslaved under the elements of the world."⁴

If according to Romans 6 and 8, believers are indeed liberated from sin, why did he describe himself as being in a state of bondage to sin in Romans 7? Proponents of the pre conversion view argue that the simplest answer to this dilemma is to view Paul's discussion involving his liberation from sin in Romans 6 and 8 as pertaining to his Christian experience and to view his discussion involving his bondage to sin in Romans 7 as pertaining to his pre conversion experience.⁵ Only by viewing Romans 6, 7, and 8 in this manner can the content of these three chapters be harmonized.⁶

Those believing that Romans 7:14-25 pertains to Paul's Christian experience respond by arguing that although believers have been liberated from sin, they do not yet enjoy complete deliverance from sin's influence. All believers caught in an "already-not yet" position. Although they have the ability to resist sin, believers must still continue to wrestle with sin until the day they die. This is why Paul instructs believers to not let sin reign in their mortal bodies and to no

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moises Silva, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 389.

⁵ Schreiner, 382.

⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. J.A. Emerson and C.E.B. Cranfield, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, Limited, 1975-1979), 357-358.

longer yield to it (Romans 6:12-13). This is also why Paul claims that the body of the believer is in need of future redemption (Romans 8:23). It explains why Paul also uses negative upo phrases to describe believers elsewhere in the New Testament (Galatians 4:3, 21).

Thus, in Romans 7:14-25, while being thankful that he has been liberated from bondage to sin, Paul yearns for the day when he will experience complete deliverance from sin's influence. The reason that Paul feels like he is in bondage in Romans 7 is due to his recognition that he is not yet completely free from sinful motives and desires.⁷ In fact, it is typically the maturest believers, such as Paul, who feel as if they are in bondage to sin the most due to the fact that they are the ones who are most aware of their sinfulness in comparison to God's holiness. In fact, Paul's awareness of his own sinfulness caused him to express despair on numerous occasions as recorded throughout the New Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:9, Paul refers to himself as the "least of the apostles" and as one who was not "fit to be called an apostle." In Ephesians 3:8, he refers to himself as "the very least of all the saints." In 1 Timothy 1:12, he marvels that the Lord considered him faithful by putting him into the ministry. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he refers to himself as the foremost of sinners.⁸ Therefore, despite his self-admission of being in bondage to sin in Romans 7, it is entirely conceivable that Romans 7 pertains to Paul's Christian experience.

In sum, the Pauline explanation of the role of sin in the lives of believers is not simple but rather is complex. Although believers have been liberated from sin's bondage, there is also a sense in which sin continues to influence believers. This tension is only grasped when Romans 6, 7, and 8 are understood in harmony with one another. Thus, it is a mistake to consider Romans 7:14-25 in isolation of Romans 6 and 8.

The Structure of the Text Favors the Pre Conversion View

Another argument in favor of viewing Romans 7:14-25 as relating to Paul's experience before his conversion involves the structure of the text. The structure of the text supports a pre-Christian experience in three ways. First, Romans 7:5 says that the passions of sin were provoked through the law and resulted in death. Romans 7:6 says that believers have been released from the law so that they may serve in the newness of the spirit. Romans 7:7-25 seems to describe the situation portrayed in Romans 7:5 in which sin and death dominate the person who is under the law. Continuity is established between those who "were in the flesh" in Romans 7:5 and the confession of the "I" that it is "fleshly" in Romans 7:14. In addition, Romans 8:1-17 seems to describe the person portrayed in Romans 7:6 who has been liberated from the dominion of the law and therefore has the ability to keep God's commandments. Therefore, proponents of the pre Christian view maintain that the simplest way of understanding the structure of the text suggests that Paul elaborates upon 7:5 in 7:14-25 by describing the experience of unbelievers. He then elaborates upon 7:6 in 8:1-17 by describing the experience of believers.⁹ Although such a structural analysis appears convincing at first glance, it does not represent a unanimous opinion among New Testament scholars. Other scholars have opted to view the text differently. For example, it is structurally possible that Romans 7:5-6 provides a summary of Paul's discussion up to that point with verse 6 setting the stage for what his readers henceforth experience as believers.¹⁰

Second, 7:13 asserts that sin, and not the law, is responsible for a person's death. The (*gar, gar*) introducing verse 14 functions as the ground for explaining how sin rather than the law

⁷ Schreiner, 384.

⁸ John F. MacArthur, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 379.

⁹ Schreiner, 385.

¹⁰ Grassmick, *Romans 7:7-25: Who Is The "I"?*, 3.

is responsible for the death of human beings. Romans 7:13 describes the experience of the unregenerate because it links death with experiencing the law. Thus, if 7:13 describes the experience of unbelievers and 7:14 amplifies upon the content of 7:13, then it stands to reason the 7:14-25 describes the experience of an unbeliever as well. Thus, pre conversion proponents maintain that those who promote a post conversion understanding of Romans 7:14-25 fail to take into consideration the close relationship between verses 13 and 14.¹¹

Third, the preceding section, verses 7-13, pertain to life prior to Christ. Thus, it is natural to assume that the subsequent section also speaks of life before Christ. Post Christian proponents maintain that verses 14-25 simply move the discussion from an Adam model to a divided self-model in order to show that the law cannot solve the problem of how to do right.¹² On the other hand, those promoting the post Christian view note the change of tenses that occurs between the two sections. For example, in 7:7-13, Paul uses predominantly past tense verbs. However, in Romans 7: 14-25, Paul shifts to present tense verbs. Post Christian advocates maintain that this change in tenses between the two sections makes it difficult to argue for the position that verses 14-25 is also speaking of life before Christ. Thus, they believe that verses 7-13 speak of Paul's pre Christian experience while verses 14-25 speak of Paul's post Christian experience.

The Contrast Between Romans 7 and 8 Favors the Pre Christian View

Another argument in favor of viewing Romans 7:14-25 as relating to Paul's experience before his conversion involves the contrast between 7:14-25 and 8:1-17. Pre conversion advocates point out that the contrast between these two portions of scripture is so dramatic that it is difficult to imagine that Paul is delineating Christian experience in both cases. An emphatic (nun, *nyn*) is used in 8:1 indicating the existence of a sharp contrast in comparison to the person who is described to be under the dominion of sin and the law in 7:14-25.¹³ However, this contrast does not necessarily have to be explained in terms of a contrast between a saved and an unsaved person. The contrast might have more to do with a saved person attempting to fulfill the obligations of the law through the power of their own finite resources in comparison with another believer attempting to fulfill God's righteous requirements through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Absence of Any Mention of the Holy Spirit in Romans 7:14-25 Favors the Pre Conversion View

Another argument favoring a pre conversion understanding of Romans 7:14-25 involves the absence of any mention of the Holy Spirit in 7:14-25. Whereas chapter 8 mentions the Holy Spirit nineteen times, 7:14-25 does not mention the Holy Spirit even once.¹⁴ Taken as a whole, chapter 7 only mentions the Holy Spirit once (7:6). Because the Holy Spirit indwells all believers (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19), pre conversion advocates maintain that the person mentioned in 7:14-25 is not a believer and that the person mentioned in Romans 8 who has the Holy Spirit is a believer. However, post Christian advocates argue that this evidence does not necessarily warrant such a hasty conclusion. It could very well be that the reason that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Romans 7:14-25 is because these verses are portraying a believer who is attempting to fulfill the demands of the law through his own power. This stands in sharp contrast to the believer in chapter 8 who is attempting to fulfill the demands of the law through

¹¹ Schreiner, 386.

¹² John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 195.

¹³ Schreiner, 387.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 387-388.

God's power. Thus, Romans 7:14-25 may describe a believer who fails to draw upon divine resources in daily living rather than an unbeliever.

The Belief of the Early Church Regarding Romans 7 Favors the Pre Christian View

The last argument supporting a reference to Paul's pre Christian experience in Romans 7 is not an exegetical argument but rather a historical one. Pre conversion advocates are fond of pointing out that most of the early church fathers, such as Origen, thought that Romans 7:14-25 described an unregenerate person.¹⁵ A pre conversion understanding was indeed Augustine's early view. However, the potency of this historical argument is easily diffused due to the fact that other great church leaders later rejected pre conversion view and instead opted to see in Romans 7:14-25 a portrait of Paul's Christian experience. For example, Augustine, partly because of his battle with Pelagius over the freedom of the will, eventually changed his opinion on this subject and decided that the person depicted in these verses was a Christian. Moreover, the church of the Middle Ages, the Latin fathers, and most of the reformers later adopted the Christian view. Luther saw in Romans 7:14-25 a classic example of his view *simul justus et peccator* which taught that a Christian is a sinner and a justified person at the same time. The interpretation that Romans 7:14-25 describes the normal Christian experience was typical of Lutheran and Reformed theology. Such thinking is still prominent in reformed circles even today.

The reformation view reigned supreme until it was challenged by the pietistic theologians of the seventeenth century. Their desire to challenge the reformation view was based largely upon ecclesiastical factors. The Pietists were reacting against what they called "dead orthodoxy" that they perceived as existing in the churches of the Reformation. They felt that viewing Romans 7:14-25 as describing the normal Christian experience led to a complacent Christian lifestyle.¹⁶ Because of Pietism's emphasis on perfectionistic sanctification, it was inconceivable to them that Paul would view Romans 7:14-25 as the norm for the Christian life.¹⁷

Arguments Supporting A Pauline Christian Experience in Romans 7:14-25

According to the "post conversion" or "regenerate view," Romans 7:14-25 reflects Paul's experiences subsequent to his conversion to Christianity. Proponents of this view advance several arguments in support of their position.

The Change of Tenses From Romans 7:7-13 to Romans 7:14-25 Favors the Post Conversion View

The first argument favoring the idea that Paul is speaking of his Christian experience in Romans 7:14-25 is related to the sudden shift in verb tenses from 7:7-13 to 7:14-25. In Romans 7:7-13, Paul uses predominantly past tense verbs. However, in Romans 7:14-25, Paul shifts to present tense verbs. Such a shift can hardly be explained as something arbitrary on Paul's part. Rather, the shift appears quite deliberate. For example, in 7:7-13, Paul uses nine past tense verbs. However, in 7:14-25, twenty-six present indicative first person verbs are used. Thus, the shift toward the present tense is emphatic and sustained.¹⁸ Post conversion proponents maintain that this shift can most naturally be explained on the grounds that in the previous verses Paul detailed his experience prior to his conversion. However, in verses 14-25 he highlights his present

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 443.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁷ Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 285.

¹⁸ Schreiner, 380.

experience.¹⁹ In other words, Paul has moved from what was (7-13) to what is (14-25). He has moved from the past (7-13) to the present (14-25). This transitional understanding is reinforced by the fact that in verses 7-13, sin appeared invincible while its invincibility appears slightly diminished in verses 14-25.²⁰

Some have proposed that Paul introduced the sudden shift to the present for purposes of vividness through the use of the historical present.²¹ However, such an explanation is implausible due to the fact that the use of past tense verbs in verses 7-13 do not exactly render Paul's discussion pale and lifeless.²² Moreover, other scholars have argued persuasively that the present tense cannot be understood as a historical present in 7:14-25. Because Paul is speaking in the first person, the label "historical present" is unlikely. It is better to view Paul's use of the present tense in these verses as gnomic rather than historical.²³

The Desire of the "I" to Keep God's Law Favors the Post Conversion View

A second argument in favor of viewing a Christian experience in Romans 7:14-25 is related to the desire (qelw, *thelō*) of the "I" (egw, *egō*) to keep God's law (15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 21). Such a desire is especially apparent in Romans 7:22 which says, "For I delight in the Law of God, in my inmost self." Based upon what Paul says elsewhere regarding the unregenerate, such a desire is not a characteristic of unbelievers. The mindset of the flesh is at enmity with God (Romans 8:7). Unbelievers do not instinctively understand nor seek God (Romans 3:11). Those in the flesh do not delight in God's law. Rather, they hate God and do not keep His law (Romans 8:5-8). Thus, a deep joy and delight in God's law must indicate the Holy Spirit indwelling the egw.²⁴

In fact, the phrase "inner person" in 7:22 (ton esw anqrwpon, *ton esō anthrōpon*) definitely signals a Christian experience. Although the phrase "the inner man" is a reasonably common expression in Hellenistic dualism,²⁵ Paul uses this same phrase only with respect to believers (2 Corinthians 4:16, Ephesians 3:16).²⁶ In addition, the Romans 7 theme that the mind is on the side of obedience to God (7:23, 25) is congruent with the notion of the renewed mind as a characteristic of the Christian in Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23.²⁷ Moreover, the very presence of a struggle is evidence of the fact that a person is regenerated and consequently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Without the work of indwelling Holy Spirit opposing the work of the fallen flesh, such a battle could not take place. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Paul elsewhere refers to warfare as the norm for the Christian life (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, only believers could find themselves practicing evil while simultaneously hating what is evil and delighting in what is good.²⁹

Those who believe that Romans 7:14-25 refers to Paul's pre conversion experience point out that it was possible for pious Jews to delight in and desire to keep God's law despite the fact that they lacked the spiritual resources necessary to do so. For example, elsewhere Paul spoke of

¹⁹ Cranfield, 344-345.

²⁰ Ziesler, 193.

²¹ Schreiner, 380.

²² Ibid.

²³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 531-532.

²⁴ Schreiner, 381

²⁵ Ziesler, 194

²⁶ Cranfield, 363

²⁷ Ziesler, 194

²⁸ Schreiner, 381.

²⁹ Nygren, 290-291.

unregenerate Jews who pursue the law for righteousness (Romans 9:31-32) and have a zeal for God (Romans 10:2). Proponents of the unregenerate view claim that this was Paul's attitude toward the law during his days as a pious Jewish rabbi prior to his conversion to Christianity. They claim that Paul attempted to live piously and was notable among his contemporaries for his religious zeal in his pre Christian days (Galatians 1:13-14, Philippians 3:4-6). However, Paul and his fellow Jews really did not delight in God's law. Rather, their true desire was in establishing their own mode of righteousness through their own legalistic path (Mark 7:13). Such a delight in legalism is very different from the joy in God's law as reflected in Romans 7:14-25.³⁰ Furthermore, Pre conversion proponents also argue that it is possible for unbelievers to delight in God's law because earlier in Romans Paul explained that God has placed his laws in the heart of all people regardless of whether they are saved or unsaved (Romans 2:14-15). However, these verses only teach that God's laws exist in the hearts of unbelievers for the purpose of convicting them of sin. Romans 2:14-15 does not teach that unbelievers delight in these laws and seek to follow them.

The View of the "I" Toward the Law Favors the Post Conversion View

A related argument favoring the Christian view involves Paul's attitude to the law. In Romans 7, Paul calls the law holy and righteous (12), spiritual (14), and good (19). Here, Paul acknowledges the intrinsic goodness of the law. It is difficult to argue that such is the language an unregenerate man. The unsaved display hostility toward God's law. In the very next chapter, Paul declares, "the sinful mind is hostile toward God and it does not submit to God's law nor can it do so." (Romans 8:7)³¹

The Desire of the "I" to be Rescued Favors the Post Conversion View

A similar argument favoring the Christian experience involves Paul's longing for final deliverance. His wretched man's cry in 7:24 expresses desire rather than despair. Paul's deepest desire is to be rescued out of his present body of death. He wants to move out of his present state of sinfulness and into a new and glorious resurrection body. According to Romans 8, this is a natural desire of the redeemed. Romans 8:23 Paul explains that God's people are to eagerly await the redemption of their bodies. Because Paul in Romans 7:24 expresses the same desire that the redeemed naturally experience according to Romans 8:23, Paul is reflecting upon his experience as a believer in Romans 7.³² Proponents of the pre conversion view claim that the future tense verb (*rusetai*, *rusetai*) or rescue represents a cry for initial salvation rather than a cry for sanctification or glorification.³³ However, this argument is unpersuasive. There is no reason why the cry of Romans 7:24 must be viewed as a cry for salvation rather than sanctification or glorification. It is just as easy to view the cry of Romans 7:24 as a cry for sanctification or glorification as it is to view it as a cry for initial salvation.

The Similarity Between Romans 7 and Galatians 5 Favors the Post Conversion View

Another post conversion argument involves the relationship between Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:16-18. Galatians 5:16-18 says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you

³⁰ Schreiner, 381, 388.

³¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News For the World* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 206.

³² *Ibid.*, 206.

³³ Grassmick, *Romans 7:7-25: Who Is The "I"?*, 6.

are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” There is an obvious continuity between Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:16-18. Both sections of scripture describe an internal battle between the desires of the flesh and spiritual desires. In Galatians 5:16-18, the battle is between the spirit (*pneuma*, *pneuma*) and the flesh (*sarx*, *sarx*). In Romans 7:14-25, the battle is between the mind (*nous*, *nous*) and the flesh (*sarx*). Because of the mention of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:16-18, this passage is dealing with the experience of a believer. Due to the fact that an almost identical experience is described in Romans 7:14-25, this portion of scripture must also be speaking of the experience of a believer.³⁴

The Duality Between the Two “I” s Favors the Post Conversion View

Yet another Christian experience argument involves the duality between the two “I” s in Romans 7:14-25. On the one hand, the “I” has nothing good within him (7:18). On the other hand, the “I” delights in the law of God (7:22). Chapter 7 even concludes with a reference to the divided state of the egw. In Romans 7:25, Paul explains that with his mind he serves the law of God but with his flesh he serves the law of sin. Such a divided personality does not fit the typical New Testament description of an unbeliever who is completely under the control of sin and uniformly united body, soul, and mind against the will of God (Romans 1:18-32, 3:9, Ephesians 4:17, Colossians 2:18, 1 Timothy 6:5, 2 Timothy 3:8, Titus 2:15).³⁵ The only appropriate explanation for such a divided personality in Romans 7:14-25 is that person under consideration is a fallen man who was indwelt by the Holy Spirit upon conversion. It is the divided self that hates evil (7:15) as the undivided sinner does not. The advent of grace through Christ makes such a division possible. With the arrival of another power, sin is no longer to have its own way.³⁶ Pre conversion advocates attempt to explain the dual “I” in Romans 7 by pointing to various parallel pagan accounts, such as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, that speak of a similar view of the divided self. However, it is debatable whether Paul was aware of these accounts.³⁷

The Overall Argument Flow of Romans 5-8 Favors the Post Conversion View

Another post conversion argument involves observing the structure of the letter. Chapters 5-8 all concern the various aspects of the believer’s new life in Christ. Romans 7:14-25 appears to continue with this theme by demonstrating the law’s inability to sanctify the believer. It would seem odd if 7:14-25 was not pertinent to the believer’s life but was instead about life without Christ. In other words, it would break the pattern of Romans 5-8 if 7:14-25 was a “flash back” to an earlier theme the author had already left behind in 3:21. Such an approach would require viewing chapter 7 as an excursus or parenthesis rather than a continuation of Paul’s basic subject in Romans 5-8.³⁸ For example, when commenting on Romans 7, some advocates of the pre conversion view argue, “the theme is indeed the same which has been under development ever since chapter 5, except of course for the great interruption in the seventh chapter.”³⁹ On the other hand, proponents of the pre Christian view respond by arguing that 7:7-13 is about life without Christ. Therefore, the pattern of Paul dealing with the life of the believer in Romans 5-8 has already been broken.⁴⁰ At any rate, it still seems odd to dedicate an entire chapter to a subject that has been previously dealt with several chapters earlier.

³⁴ Schreiner, 384.

³⁵ Moo, 446-447.

³⁶ Ziesler, 192.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Nygren, 288.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ziesler, 193.

The Anticlimactic Nature of Romans 7:25b Favors the Post Conversion View

Another argument favoring Christian experience involves the words that conclude 7:25. These words say, “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” If Romans 7:14-25 related to the pre Christian experience, one would expect the passage to conclude with “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25a). The slavery of the old life would yield to victory and joy inaugurated by the new life. Thus, the passage would reach its climax and conclude with a note of triumph indicating that the old life of failure is left behind. However, the passage concludes with the words of 7:25b that say, “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” After voicing the exclamation of thanksgiving (7:25a), Paul returns to the tension of verses 14-25 (7:25b) rather than ending the pericope on a note of victory. Reverting to the tension following the exclamation of thanksgiving suggests that the deliverance available through Christ does not eliminate the ongoing struggle with sin in the Christian experience.⁴¹ In other words, if 7:25a furnishes the solution, how can Paul revert to a statement of the problem in 7:25b? Thus, the pre Christian view makes Romans 7:25b a *non sequitur* and anticlimactic. On the other hand, pre-conversion view proponents respond by arguing that 7:25b merely summarizes the state of affairs as they existed prior to the intervention of Christ that is anticipated in 7:25a. However, a more satisfying explanation is that verses 14-24 are about the Christian experience. Romans 7:25a acknowledges that in the end Christ brings deliverance. However, Romans 7:25b shows that in the interim, the tension continues.⁴²

Those holding to a pre Christian interpretation have responded by arguing that 7:25b represents marginal gloss that has been inserted into the text. Therefore, 7:25b must have been interpolated because it destroys the climax of the text. Bultmann even acknowledges that if 7:25b is authentic, then 7:14-25 must refer to the Christian experience.⁴³ However, any theory proposing that 7:25b represents gloss should be discarded due to the fact that there is no evidence in the manuscript tradition that the verse is suspect.⁴⁴ Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that an interpolator would insert a marginal gloss at this point thus destroying the climax of the passage.⁴⁵ Others holding to a pre Christian interpretation have suggested that 7:25a and 7:25b have been transposed. Again, there is no evidence in the MSS to support this theory. As a result, most commentators have been unwilling to except both the gloss and the transposition theories due to the absence of evidence in the MSS.⁴⁶

The Personal Experience of Christians Favors the Post Conversion View

A final argument favoring Christian experience is not an exegetical argument but rather an existential one. The post conversion view best reflects the regular experiences of most believers. The vast majority of Christians identify with the “I” that is unable to put into practice what is desired.⁴⁷ Perhaps this is because the more seriously the Christian strives for holiness, the more sensitive he becomes to the reality of his continuing sinfulness.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Schreiner, 380.

⁴² Ziesler, 193.

⁴³ Schreiner, 380.

⁴⁴ Cranfield, 368.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, 380-381.

⁴⁶ Ziesler, 193.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, 384.

⁴⁸ Cranfield, 358.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both the pre conversion and post conversion positions advance strong arguments. However, as the preceding discussion indicates, the balance of the evidence seems to tip in favor of the post conversion position. Most of the pre conversion view arguments have been answered. On the hand, pre conversion proponents have not satisfactorily explained how it is possible for an unsaved God hating man to delight in obeying God's law.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Throughout church history, theologians have struggled to articulate the moral character of people not only in their state as unbelievers but also as believers. There seem to be two general schools of thought. Some emphasize the tremendous spiritual change that takes place within the believer at the moment of their salvation. They often quote 2 Corinthians 5:17 which says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!" They believe this change can lead to complete victory over sin and even eradication of sin not only in the next life but in this one as well. On the other hand, others describe people after salvation as having two natures. These two natures include the old nature that believers possessed prior to salvation and the new nature that believers inherited at the moment of salvation. Romans 7 sheds light upon this subject. As previously discussed, in Romans 7:14-25, Paul appears to be speaking of his status as a believer rather than an unbeliever. Such a conclusion profoundly impacts one's understanding of Christian anthropology. Romans 7:14-25 appears to be teaching that believers have both a spiritual nature and an Adamic nature simultaneously residing within them.

Paul's Use of "Flesh" (sarx) Supports the Dual Nature View

The notion that some component of the old nature continues to reside in the believer even after salvation is apparent from Paul's use of the term "flesh" (sarx) in Romans 7. Throughout the New Testament, the term "flesh" (sarx) is used in many different ways. For example, it is used of the material that covers the bones of a human or animal body (1 Corinthians 15:39a). It can also be used to depict the body itself (Ephesians 5:29). Moreover, "flesh" (sarx) is often used to describe a man of flesh and blood (Acts 2:17, 1 Peter 1:24). In addition, the term "flesh" (sarx) can also refer to children of natural descent (Romans 9:8). It also refers to the limitations of life on earth (1 Corinthians 7:28) or the external and outward side of life (1 Corinthians 1:26).⁴⁹

However, when Paul uses the term "flesh" (sarx), it typically refers to the willing instrument of sin (Galatians 5:13, 24, Colossians 2:18, 23, Ephesians 2:3). Paul consistently uses "flesh" (sarx) to contrast fallen human nature with the spirit (pneuma) in Galatians 5 and 6 and Romans 8. Well over half of the references to "flesh" (sarx) as fallen human nature appear in Romans.⁵⁰ Thus, the notion of the "flesh" (sarx) representing fallen human nature is Paul's predominate use of "flesh" (sarx) in Romans (6:19, 7:5, 18, 25, 8:3, 4-9, 12, 13, 13:14).⁵¹ Therefore, by consistently using the term "flesh" (sarx) in Romans 7 (7:5, 18, 25), Paul makes clear that some component of the old nature continues to reside in the believer even after

⁴⁹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and adaptation by William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 743-744.

⁵⁰ Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 304.

⁵¹ John R. Kohlenberger, Edward W. Goodrick, James A. Swanson, *The Greek English Concordance to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 680-681.

salvation. This residue of the old self remains even though the believer has received a new nature as well as the indwelling ministry of the Spirit upon conversion.

Numerous Theologians Have Advocated a Dual Nature View

By taking a post conversion view of Romans 7:14-25 and by observing Paul's usage of "flesh" (sarx) in Romans 7, many reputable theologians and expositors have argued for a dual nature concept within believers. Although most of the early church fathers believed that Romans 7:14-25 depicted a pre conversion experience, Augustine taught that Christians have two distinct natures. For example, in *Confessions*, Augustine compared his own struggles with sin to those described by Paul in Romans 7:14-25.⁵² Although it is not entirely clear at this point in Augustine's *Confessions* whether he was referring to his experience before or after salvation, Augustine later on definitely took the position that Romans 7:14-25 refers to the struggle that takes place within the believer.⁵³ According to Hodge, although Augustine first concurred in advocating the pre conversion view, a deeper insight into his heart and a more thorough investigation of the scriptures led him to alter his view.⁵⁴ For example, Augustine later recognized the conflict between sin and righteousness in the believer when writing *Palatinus*.⁵⁵ Moreover, Augustine also later commented on the contest between the flesh and the spirit within the believer.⁵⁶ Thus, in Augustine's writings we find an understanding of sin in some form continuing in the life of the believer leading to a conflict between the flesh and the believer's new status as represented by the Spirit and the new nature.⁵⁷

The writers of the Middle Ages as well as most of the Protestant reformers seemed to follow this Augustinian dual nature concept. For example, the dual nature idea can be seen in the writings of Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, and Beza.⁵⁸ The concept can also be found in the writings of nineteenth and twentieth century Calvinists such as Charles Hodge⁵⁹ and Anthony A. Hoekema. In fact, Hoekema asserts that every believer is a kind of Jekyll and Hyde combination due to the fact that the scriptures affirm that there is a continual struggle in every believer between his old nature and his new.⁶⁰

Dispensationalists such as C. I Scofield also adopted the two nature concept. When commenting on Romans 7:14, Scofield states, "In this passage (7:15-25) of profound spiritual and Psychological insight, the apostle personifies the struggle of the two natures within the believer-the old Adamic nature, and the divine nature received through the new birth (1 Peter 1:23, 2 Peter 1:4, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:27).⁶¹ Chafer also seems to hint at an understanding of the dual nature view when he speaks of a certain category of Christians who are dominated by the flesh.⁶² Ryrie also demonstrates a similar understanding of the dual nature

⁵² Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 14 vols. (rep. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:121.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, n.8.

⁵⁴ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, eds. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (New York: Armstrong & Son, 1909), 376-77.

⁵⁵ Schaff, 1:571.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:264-265.

⁵⁷ John F. Walvoord, "The Augustinian Dispensational Perspective" in *Five Views of Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 203.

⁵⁸ Hodge, 376-377.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁶⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Struggle Between Old and New Natures in the Converted Man," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1962): 42.

⁶¹ C. I. Scofield, ed. *The NIV Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1184.

⁶² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That is Spiritual* (Rev. ed. Philadelphia: Sunday School Times Company, 1918; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 10 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

concept when he states, “The moment someone accepts Jesus as his personal Savior he becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The life of God within him begets a new nature which remains with him along with the old as long as he lives. Understanding the presence, position and relationship of the old and new within the life of the believer is essential to experiencing a wholesome and balanced spiritual life.”⁶³

The Dual Nature View Does Not Teach Spiritual Schizophrenia

Some theologians are hesitant to use the term “dual nature” for fear that using such terminology falsely depicts two distinct people living within the same person. They claim that such a distinction leads to a false disjuncture within the individual personality.⁶⁴ For this reason, Ryrie prefers to define nature as capacity. Thus, the old nature of the flesh is that capacity which all men have to please and serve self.⁶⁵ Similarly, Smith indicates that the word “nature” (*fysis*, *physis*) does not designate a substance or an entity. Rather, it is a word that refers to the inherent or essential qualities of any substance or entity.⁶⁶ While not explicitly rejecting the two-nature view, Smith prefers to define the new nature as the set of attributes, aspirations, ambitions, capacities, desires, and motivations imparted at regeneration. He similarly defines the Adamic nature as the set of attributes, aspirations, ambitions, capacities, desires, and motivations emanating from the believer’s sinful nature. In other words, believers must be able to separately envision that set of character qualities that are theirs by nature and that set of qualities that result from divine work in their hearts.⁶⁷ Thus, both Ryrie and Smith, while not overtly rejecting the dual nature view, prefer to steer away from language and definitions that would falsely depict Christians as spiritual schizophrenics.

However, the suggestion that believers have two natures does not necessarily warrant the conclusion that believers are also spiritual schizophrenics. Theologians also use the word nature to describe both the human and divine attributes of Christ. Yet, by teaching that Christ possessed two natures, no one also suggests that Christ’s personality was also divided and schizophrenic. Christ was simply one person with two natures. Similarly, believers are merely one person with two natures.⁶⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, the spiritual state of a saved person includes both a new and old nature. Therefore, the believer still has an old nature that consists of a complex set of attributes with an inclination and disposition to sin. At the same time, the believer also possesses a new nature that he received at the moment of salvation. This new nature is also comprised of a complex set of attributes. However, they incline and dispose the believer to holiness and a new manner of life.

RAMIFICATIONS REGARDING SANCTIFICATION

According to the preceding discussion, Romans 7:14-25 reflects the normal experience of the believer due to the fact that the believer has two natures. If these notions are true, what impact should they have upon our view of sanctification? These concepts impact our understanding of practical sanctification in three ways. First, in order to experience practical

⁶³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 34.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁶⁶ Charles R. Smith, “Two Natures-Or one? An Attempt a Theological Clarification” *Voice* 62 (July August 1983), 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁸ Walvoord, 203-204, 207.

sanctification, the believer must depend upon God's resources. Second, human responsibility plays a vital role in the sanctification process. Third, ultimate sanctification will only become a reality in the next life rather than this one.

The Believer Must Depend Upon Divine Enablement In order to Experience Practical Sanctification

From the perspective of the dual nature view, the basic problem is how believers with two diverse natures can achieve at least a relative measure of sanctification and holiness in this life? The answer to this question is that believers cannot live a holy life apart from divine help. Due to the fact that the old nature has a tendency to sin and the new nature has a tendency to act in righteousness, the believer experiences a constant struggle identical to the one described in Romans 7:14-25. Because of this ongoing struggle, the new nature cannot in and of itself produce a righteous life. Thus, a righteous life is only possible through the spiritual resources and enablement provided by God. On the divine side, God must provide these resources in order to meet the Christian's spiritual needs. On the human side, believers must appropriate of these resources.⁶⁹ The New Testament carefully itemizes the various spiritual provisions that believers must appropriate in order to enable him to experience personal sanctification.

The Provision of the Holy Spirit

The first resource provided by God is the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ When a person trusts Christ as his savior, he is immediately regenerated by (Titus 3:4, John 3:3-8), baptized by (1 Corinthians 12:13), sealed by (Ephesians 4:30), and indwelt with (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19) the Holy Spirit. Despite the fact that all believers are regenerated by, baptized by, sealed by and indwelt with the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, believers must learn to depend upon the Spirit. Paul referred to the believer's moment by moment dependence upon the Spirit as walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Such dependence allows the believer to be able to tap into the divine source that are necessary not only for spiritual fruitfulness but also for sanctification. In sum, practical sanctification is only accomplished in the life of the believer when he taps into the divine resource of the Spirit. This is accomplished when believers follow God's command to continuously walk in the Holy Spirit.

The Provision of the Believer's Union With Christ

The second spiritual resource provided by God is the believer's union with and identification into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Before a person comes to Christ, he is a slave to his Adamic nature. However, when a person becomes a Christian, he becomes identified into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Such identification breaks the power of the believer's Adamic nature to enslave him any longer. The Adamic nature will continue to tempt the believer to sin as long as the believer remains in his present, physical body. However, the believer still has the ability to refuse the yearnings of the old nature due to his union with Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:1-10, Galatians 2:20). In order to experience personal sanctification, the believer must consider his union with Christ and his freedom from sin's enslavement to be a reality (6:11). The believer must then follow God's command of not yielding to sin (6:12, 13). In sum, practical sanctification is only accomplished in the life of the believer when he taps into the divine resource of his identification with Christ's death, burial,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 209.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 209-220.

and resurrection. This is accomplished when believers follow God's commands of acknowledging this union to be a reality and not yielding to sin.

Human Responsibility Plays an Important Role in the Sanctification Process

Understanding the dual nature concept within the believer leads to the conclusion that any degree of practical sanctification is impossible without the spiritual resources provided by God. As previously explained, these resources include the filling of the Spirit as well as the believer's union with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. However, as also previously explained, the believer must appropriate these resources. In other words, Christians do not automatically experience practical sanctification just because they have been made new creatures in Christ. They must first appropriate the divine resources in order to experience practical sanctification. In order to appropriate these resources, a volitional response on the part of the believer is needed. Although it is God's responsibility to provide these resources, it is the believer's responsibility to appropriate them in order for practical sanctification to become a personal reality.

For example, the believer must exercise responsibility in order to obey God's command of walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Similarly, the believer must exercise responsibility in order to obey God's command of reckoning (*logizomai*, *logizomai*) himself dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11). Furthermore, the believer must exercise responsibility in order to obey God's command of not yielding to sin (Romans 6:12-13). These scriptural exhortations would be meaningless if human responsibility were not associated with these aspects of sanctification. When believers fulfill their responsibility of responding to the mandates of God's word, they permit God to work out His plan of sanctification in their lives. In other words, the believer's practical sanctification is sovereignly determined by God to be conditioned on human response. In contrast, there are other views of sanctification, typically emanating from reformed circles, which have a tendency of marginalizing human responsibility and maximizing divine sovereignty. Because of the God ordained role of human responsibility in the sanctification process, any view of practical sanctification that is based wholly upon the sovereign acts of God apart from human participation must be rejected.⁷¹

Ultimate Perfection Will Occur in Heaven Rather Than In the Present

Although believers can experience relative perfection in this life as well as manifest Christ likeness in a significant way, ultimate or perfect sanctification will not become a reality for the believer until they stand in God's presence in heaven. This reality is due to the fact that the believer is comprised of both a carnal and a spiritual nature as long as they remain in their present, physical body. Thus, as long as the believer remains in his present body, he will always be tempted to appease the yearnings of the sin nature. For this reason, some degree of sin will always be a reality for the believer in this life. This concept explains Paul's yearning for deliverance from his physical body (Romans 7:24). It also explains why he describes himself as not having yet obtained or been made perfect (Philippians 3:12). It also explains why John teaches that believers are to confess their sins (1 John 1:9).

After the believer leaves his present body either through death or the translation of the church, he will have the ability to enjoy ultimate perfection. Although while in his present body he will always be haunted by his dual nature state, he will eventually become a single natured entity rather than a dual natured entity after he has left his present body. At that future point in time, complete personal holiness will become a reality for the believer. No longer harassed by

⁷¹ Ibid., 224-225.

his dual nature status, he will then be part of “a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5:27). At that time, he will be perfect just as Jesus is perfect (1 John 3:2). He will be part of a heavenly community characterized by absolute holiness (Revelation 21:8).

Because such a state of sinless perfection will only be a heavenly reality, alternative views of sanctification that offer a state of sinless perfection in this life must be rejected. Such alternative views of sanctification that come extremely close to offering a state of sinless perfection in this life include the teachings of the Pietistic tradition as well as the Wesleyan notion of “entire sanctification.” Along these same lines, Needham maintains that, “if you have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are not a sinner.”⁷² These types of views are not plausible due to the fact that they tend to ignore the dual natures of the believer. For example, Needham argues that it is illogical to hold that Romans 7:14-25 is describing the typical experience of the believer.⁷³ According to Walvoord, Needham so emphasizes the idea of a Christian being a new creation in Christ that he almost eliminates the concept of sin in the believer.⁷⁴ In sum, due to the believer’s dual nature existence, he will always be tempted to yield to his carnal nature as long as he remains in his present body. Thus, the continual presence of such temptation makes a state of sinless perfection in this life an unrealistic option for the Christian.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that one’s understanding of practical sanctification is profoundly impacted by how one views the “I” in Romans 7:7-25. Specifically, the paper has argued that the “I” in Romans 7 is Paul, and in verses 14-25 Paul is reflecting upon his post conversion experience. In addition, the paper has maintained that a post conversion view of Romans 7:14-25 leads to a dual nature view of the believer. Finally, the paper has contended that viewing believers through the lenses of the dual nature view shapes one’s understanding of practical sanctification in several important ways.

⁷² David C. Needham, *Birthright! Christian, Do You Know Who You Are?* (Portland: Multnomah, 1979), 47.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁴ Walvoord, 207.

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