

2. The History and Experience of Israel under the Law (7:7–25): As this heading indicates (and as you might recall, this outline is from Moo), Moo believes that Paul is describing himself in the passage in solidarity with Israel. While I agree that Paul does describe his condition as an Israelite under the Law, I would argue that he does so from a *Christian* perspective. This interpretation differs from that of Moo, who believes that Paul is describing the experience of an *unbeliever* (the pre-conversion Paul in solidarity with his fellow Israelites) through verse 25. This difference does not result in a significantly different approach to 7:1–12, but it will affect how I approach 7:13–25.
- a. The Coming of the Law (7:7–12): Paul wants to accomplish two things in this section. First, “he wants to vindicate the law from the charge that it is itself evil” (*EBR*, 107). Second, he wants to explain “the exact relationship among sin, the law, and death (*Ibid.*).
- Paul answers the first objection, “**Is the law sinful?**” with a “**Certainly not!**” or “**Absolutely Not!**” (v. 7). He then explains his answer using an account in the first person (“**I**”). However, who is the “**I**”?
 - It may be Adam. This might explain how he can say that “**I**” once was “**alive apart from the law**” and then “**died**” (vv. 8–9). However, Adam did not receive the Law of Moses. Adam always was “apart from the law,” and it seems that in this context, Paul is talking about the Law of Moses.
 - It may be Paul in solidarity with Israel (Moo). This seems to fit with the emphasis on the Mosaic Law. However, while this may work for verses 7–12, I am not convinced it works for verses 14–25 (as I will argue below).
 - It seems best to conclude that Paul is talking about himself. He is the “**I**.” This seems the most natural way of taking the “**I**.” However, in verses 7–12, he is likely speaking of himself as a representative of a typical Jewish person who, at an early age, was taught the Law of Moses and found that having and knowing the Law did not prevent one from sinning.⁵²
 - The Law itself was not sin. Instead, it actually had a good purpose—to reveal sin (v. 7a). Paul illustrates this with the 10th commandment against coveting (v. 7b). He likely chooses this one sin because it is an inward disposition. The Law told him that coveting was wrong, but sin seized an advantage through the Law and caused Paul to covet even more (v. 8). Apart from the Law, sin is “**dead**,” i.e., it lies dormant, but when we are aware of God’s law, we also receive a greater awareness of our sins. Furthermore, being told that God prohibits something for the unbeliever actually stirs up a greater desire to do it. Before receiving this

⁵² Of course, Paul was also “in Adam,” like the rest of humanity, so when he says that the commandment “**deceived**” him in v. 11, he may be alluding to the Serpent’s deception of Eve. In other words, Paul realized that his own disobedience of the 10th commandment was typical of the disobedience which had been occurring since Adam and Eve’s first rebellion.

commandment, Paul was blissfully ignorant of his rebellion (“**alive**” in v. 9 probably refers to “complacent self-assurance and calm,” Murray, 1:251). However, now having received the commandment (likely at some point during his childhood), he came to realize that the Law which had promised eternal life if kept (cf. Lev 18:5) actually led to death (vv. 10–11). Paul concludes (“**So then**”) from all of this that the problem was not with the Law (v. 12). The Law was “**holy,**” and the commandment was “**holy, righteous and good.**”

b. Life under the Law (7:13–25)

- Paul’s statement that the Law was good (v. 12) leads to a possible objection, “**Did that which is good, then, become death to me?**” Paul’s response is essentially that it is sin that leads to death. The Law was not a direct cause of death. Sin uses the Law as an instrument, but sin is the cause of death. The instrument itself is good. The reason why sin has this power is that something inside of us is still inclined towards sin. This is certainly true before our conversion, but it also remains true following our conversion while we wait for our glorification. Even though through union with Christ, our bondage to sin is broken, we still return to serve our old master. Paul illustrates this dilemma in vv. 14–25 with another long passage using the first person “**I.**”
- Some see Paul using a hypothetical or fictional person as a rhetorical device. However, there does not seem (at least to me) any clear indication that Paul is using a rhetorical device. Others have argued that Paul’s style here does not actually match the pattern adopted by Greek writers who used this rhetorical device. “The intensity of Paul’s description and the use of the ‘I’ do not appear as merely rhetorical or generic but deeply personal and very experiential.”⁵³
- Therefore, is Paul speaking from the perspective of a Christian or the perspective of a non-believer?
- Arguments in Favor of the “Non-Christian” View (Moo, Fee, Ridderbos, Hoekema, Gundry):⁵⁴
 - As far as we can tell, this was the dominant view of the early Greek church leaders.
 - The description “**I am of unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin**” or “I am of the flesh, sold under sin” (ESV, v. 14b) seems to contradict the description of the Christian given in Chapter 6. In fact, Paul frequently uses phrases that start with “under” to describe unbelievers (cf. Rom 3:9; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:10, 22, 23, 25; 4:2).

⁵³ McCune, *Systematic Theology*, 3:134.

⁵⁴ For this listing of the arguments for both views, I relied primarily on the helpful survey provided by Harrison and Hagner, 125. For a more detailed recent survey see esp. Schreiner, 377ff.

or two parts of one person but are just two competing tendencies within one person. Only the person who has been born again has this new “nature.” So, even though the Spirit is not mentioned in this passage, the “nature” he creates in the believer is described. This is seen in the struggle within Paul (v. 16) and the fact that he attributes his disobedience to indwelling sin (v. 17). He wants to follow God’s law, but he also has something within him that wages war against this desire (v. 23). When Paul speaks in this passage of “willing” or “not willing” to do something, he consistently speaks from the perspective of this “**inner being**” or “inner man” who desires to follow God’s law. He is not absolving himself of responsibility for his sins, but he acknowledges that his sinning goes against this more profound impulse to do right that the Spirit has produced within him.

- Arguments in Favor of the “Christian” View (Schreiner⁵⁶, Murray, Morris, Hendriksen, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, Andrew Naselli):
 - Although it does not appear to be as old as the previous view (at least in the writings that we still possess), it was held by Augustine (later in life), Luther, and Calvin. This was the dominant view among the Reformers and has remained prevalent in the Reformed tradition.
 - The switch from the past tense to the present tense in verses 14ff indicates that Paul has switched to describing his present condition.
 - Some would respond that the present tense is being used to create vividness or to describe the ongoing life of the unbeliever.
 - Paul’s description of his pre-conversion life in Philippians 3:6 does not seem to match the struggle and wretchedness described in Romans 7:14–25.
 - Some would argue that Philippians 3 describes his outward conformity to the Law, while Romans 7 describes his inner struggle.
 - In the flow of the epistle, Paul seems to have already moved past describing the unsaved person. The switch from describing the unbeliever’s condition to the believer’s new standing is usually placed in Chapter 3. It would seem odd, it is argued, to return here to describing an unsaved person after what has been said in Chapters 4–6.

⁵⁶ To be more precise, Schreiner, following Timmins, prefers to describe his view as “the anthropological condition of human beings” (386). In other words, it is a description of our fallen condition in Adam, but it is a *Christian’s* perspective of this condition (Paul representing not only those who were “in Adam” but also those who now are “in Christ”). Timmins describes this as “a distinctly Christian manifestation of this fundamentally human phenomenon.” Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the “I” in Its Literary Context*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 170 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 205.

- Some would argue that Paul returns to describing his unsaved state because he is addressing the issue of obedience to the Law.
- Paul seems to describe this same kind of conflict within a Christian in Galatians 5:17 (“the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit...”). You might also add here 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Philippians 3:12–14 (Hendriksen, 226). Peter describes a similar struggle within a believer (1 Pet 2:11).
- Only a believer, it is argued, could appropriately diagnose the struggle described in verses 14–25. An unbeliever’s conscience can be bothered by sin, but an unbeliever would not have identified the problem as an inability to keep a Law that he loved.
- It seems more likely that a believer would say, “**For in my inner being I delight in God’s law**” (v. 22).
 - Some would respond that devout or pious Jews (like the Pharisee Paul) would have delighted in God’s Law even though they could not keep it. **However**, was this really true of their “**inner being**”? It seems that Paul is using “inner being” or “inner man” here to refer “his inmost spirit, in the centre of his personality” (Murray, 1:265).⁵⁷ He seems to be referring to this same thing when he speaks of serving the law of God with his “**mind**” in **verse 25**. This does not appear to be a description of the piety of the Pharisees, which was merely external, or an “obedience” to God’s law that is wrongly motivated.
- Even after Christ is identified as the solution in **verse 25a**, the passage still ends by speaking of the conflict as ongoing (**v. 25b**). This seems to indicate that the section as a whole (vv. 14–25) has been describing one who has been given the new birth but still awaits their full deliverance from sin.
- **Conclusion:** I think it best to conclude that Paul is describing his present experience in verses 14–25. In this context, he is addressing the Law of Moses, but what he says applies to any believer who is confronted by God’s moral law. He knows that God’s law is good, but “another principle” (that is likely how “**another law**” should be translated in v. 23) is at work within him. He sees himself as “**wretched**” because he is viewing himself in “the light of the holy and spiritual law of God (Rom 7:14, 16). In that light, even as a believer, indwelling sin is revealed in all its ugly rebellion against God.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “he finds that that which represents his deepest and truest self is the determinate will to the good and it is that deepest and truest self he calls ‘the inward man.’ It is ‘inward’ because it is deepest and inmost” (Murray, 1:266).

⁵⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 160.

- There is a version of the Christian view of 7:14–25, which sees three distinct stages of the Christian life in Romans 7–8. First, there is the pre-conversion state or natural state, which many would see depicted in 7:5–9. Second, there is a believer who is immature (or sometimes called “carnal”) who has not advanced in his sanctification and is still struggling with trying to keep God’s law. This stage is sometimes identified with 7:14–25. Finally, there is thought to be a final, mature stage, which is described in 8:1ff. However, the NT never describes an additional step after conversion that is necessary to move one from an initial, immature stage to a more spiritually advanced stage. Instead, our sanctification is always portrayed as many steps of obedience that we must make daily in an inevitable but not automatic process of becoming more like Christ. This three-stage scheme seems to be something that is being imposed on the text rather than drawn from the text. Therefore, “Paul is not drawing a psychological portrait in which believers defeated by sin find the secret to victory over it. His point is that the flesh (native human capacities) has no ability to observe God’s commandments” (Schreiner, 377). “Others may consider Romans 7 the wrong way of sanctification and Romans 6 or possibly Romans 8 the correct way. But none of these seems to be the case. Paul is describing the normal Christian experience due to the two natures within the believer.”⁵⁹

D. Assurance of Eternal Life in the Spirit (8:1–30): Each of the three sub-section within 8:1–30 emphasizes a different aspect of the Spirit’s ministry to the believer. In the first section (8:1–13), the Spirit is the one who gives life (“**Spirit of life,**” v. 2).

1. The Spirit of Life (8:1–13): “The Spirit applies the work of God in Christ to us so that we can enjoy life, both new spiritual life in the present and resurrection life in the future” (*EBR*, 116).
 - **Verses 1–4:** The Spirit, on the basis of Christ’s work, overcomes the ruin brought about by Adam. In **verse 1**, Paul returns to the idea he was developing in 7:1–6. Believers have been set free from their bondage to the Law, “**therefore**” being united with Christ (“**in Christ Jesus**”), they do not receive any “**condemnation**” or curse for failing to keep God’s moral law. Before our conversion, sin had an irresistible pull on or power over us (in the phrase “**the law of sin,**” Paul is using the word normally translated *law* to refer to a principle or power, like the “law of gravity”; cf. “**the law of sin**” in 7:23), and this “law of sin” inevitably would one day lead to eternal death. Therefore, the phrase “**the law of sin and death**” could be translated as the “principle of sin that produces death.” Believers are freed from

⁵⁹ McCune, *Systematic Theology*, 3:134.

these two destructive powers (sin and death) by a greater power, the life-giving Spirit. The “**law of the Spirit**” then is the “power of God’s Spirit that enables believers to break free from sin’s use of the law for its own deadly purposes (cf. 7:5, 8–11) and experience eternal life (6:22)” (Thielman, 379). The Mosaic Law could not break this power of sin (it was itself the unwitting tool of sin due to our human nature), but God did break this power through the sending of his Son to be a sin offering for us (v. 3).⁶⁰ The **purpose** for God sending his Son to do this work was “**so that**” (v. 4) the “**righteous requirement of the law**” might be fulfilled in the lives of believers.⁶¹ Some have argued that this is a reference to our justification; that is, we are being considered by God to have perfectly kept the Law (e.g., Moo, 506–7). However, since this section is talking about sin’s power rather than sin’s penalty, it is much more likely that Paul is referring to the work of the Spirit, which causes us to do what the Law required (notice that “**might be fully met in us**” is passive; it is someone else, i.e., the Spirit, doing the work in or through us). These believers in whom the requirement of the Law is fulfilled are described as those “**who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**” (v. 4b).

- **Verses 5–9:** In this paragraph, Paul explains (“for” beings v. 5 in many English versions) why people who walk according to the Spirit (as opposed to other people) fulfill the Law. He does this by setting up a contrast between the realms of the “**flesh**” and the “**Spirit**,” which each have people living in them. The believer has already been transferred to the realm of the Spirit and has the Spirit indwelling him (v. 9a).⁶² Those in the new realm have a completely different mindset from those in the old realm (vv. 5–6). Therefore, in the old realm with its mindset, we could not submit to God’s law or please him (vv. 7–8), but now we can desire the things the Spirit desires (v. 5b).

⁶⁰ In v. 3, Paul uses “**flesh**” to describe the orientation towards sin that we all share as humans. The word translated *flesh* can be a neutral term that simply describes the human condition (cf. Rom 1:3 which uses it to describe Christ’s incarnation; the NIV translates it as “his earthly life”). However, except for Christ who, as an Eternal Person, entered the human race in a special manner, all of us in this human condition arrive already having an orientation towards sin. In v. 4, Paul reminds us that God sent his own Son as a human to be a sin offering, but Paul also is careful to say that the Son came “**in the likeness of sinful flesh**,” which is likely his way of saying that Jesus was truly human but yet distinct from the rest of Adam’s race in that Jesus was not a sinner.

⁶¹ Paul might be using “**requirement**” (note that it is singular) to refer to everything that the Law required as a package. However, it is possible that he is thinking of the command to love neighbor as a single requirement that summarizes the whole Law (cf. Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14).

⁶² “That Paul in the same verse can speak of the believer as “in the Spirit” and the Spirit as being “in” the believer reveals the metaphorical nature of his language. In the one case, the Spirit is pictured as entering into and taking control of the person’s life; in the other, the believer is pictured as living in that realm in which the Spirit rules, guides, and determines one’s destiny” (Moo, 512–13). In other words, both metaphors describe the same reality, which is the Spirit’s power over the believer’s life.

- **Verses 10–11:** Here, Paul switches to speaking of Christ “**in**” the believer, which seems to be another way of describing the reality that earlier Paul called us being “**in**” Christ (cf. Rom 5:12–21). Paul is not equating the Son with the Spirit (notice how he also switches to speaking of the “**the Spirit of Christ**” in v. 9), but all three Persons of the Godhead work together in close association. Even though the believer is dying (“**though your body is subject to death**”), he will receive life by means of the Spirit because of the “**righteousness**” of Christ that was imputed to him (v. 10; NIV—“**the Spirit gives life because of righteousness**”). We will die because of sin (assuming that the Rapture does not occur first), but because of Christ’s righteousness, we will be raised from the dead by the Spirit, who also raised Christ.
 - **Verses 12–13:** In the last two verses of this section, Paul makes an inference from the truths taught in vv. 5–11. “And so, while [Paul] can proclaim the life that the Spirit has won for us, Paul now reminds us that we will never experience that life unless we are growing in holiness. We are to use the Spirit to ‘put to death’ the continuing sinful patterns of behavior from the old life” (*EBR*, 119). Therefore, “**put to death the misdeeds of the body**” (v. 13) is parallel to “**so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with**” in 6:6 with both describing the ongoing removal of sin from our lives that has been made possible by the Triune God’s work. We must do this and can do this to avoid eternal death. “The believer’s once-for-all death to the law of sin does not free him from the necessity of mortifying sin in his members; it makes it *necessary* and *possible* for him to do so” (Murray, 1:294).
2. The Spirit of Adoption (8:14–17): “The Spirit makes us aware that we are God’s own children and that as his children we can expect a wonderful inheritance someday” (*EBR*, 116).
- Those whom the Spirit leads are the sons of God (v. 14). Paul’s careful use of the word “**led**” likely indicates that the Spirit is not, on the one hand, forcing believers to do things contrary to their will, but on the other hand, the Spirit is the one that is ultimately responsible for the believer’s obedience. When we put to death the “**misdeeds of the body**” (cf. v. 13), we are not doing something in which we can boast. Furthermore, the Spirit assures us that we are God’s children by causing us not to be afraid of God’s judgment and prompting us to cry out to him as our Father (vv. 15–16). The “**spirit of adoption**” (NASB) is a reference to the Holy Spirit who gives us the new birth and brings us into God’s family (cf. the NIV’s “**the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship**”). The Spirit is not a “**spirit of bondage**,” which causes us to continue fearing God’s judgment.
 - So, if we are God’s children (and the presence of the Spirit means that we are), then that means that we are also heirs of God who will share in the inheritance promised to the Messiah (cf. Gal 3:16–18, 29; the promise to the “**seed**” in Gen 22:17–18). We

will receive this inheritance if we suffer alongside Christ. If we suffer with Christ, we will reach the goal of being glorified with him (v. 17; cf. 1 Pet 1:11)—“There is no sharing in Christ’s glory unless there is sharing in his sufferings. Sufferings and then glory was the order appointed for Christ himself” (Murray, 1:299).

3. The Spirit of Glory (8:18–30): The reference to “**glory**” in **verse 18** and being “**glorified**” in **verse 30** form the bookends of this section. The “Spirit causes us to groan at the present time, manifesting our frustration at not yet experiencing the glory to which we are infallibly destined” (*EBR*, 116).
 - In **verse 18**, Paul begins this new paragraph by elaborating (“for” in NASB) upon the “sufferings” described in verse 17. These “**sufferings**” in verse 18 are not limited to persecution as a Christian but include all forms of suffering that we endure in a sin-cursed world. These sufferings are small compared to the glory which will be “**revealed**” when Christ returns.
 - In **verses 19–22**, Paul explains (“for”) what he means by “**revealed**” in verse 18. We are still waiting for the curse’s effects to be removed, which means that our final state is not yet seen. To describe the expectation that we have for this day, Paul personifies creation as one that “groans” and “suffers” while it waits for the “**children of God**” to be revealed because on that day it also will have the curse placed on it removed. God was the one who placed the curse (“**the one who subjected it**” is God), so he also is the one who can remove it.
 - In a way similar to creation, believers are eagerly looking forward to the day when their final state will be revealed (“**as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship,**” v. 23). We have the Spirit as “**the firstfruits,**”⁶³ but we are still waiting for all of the benefits of being adopted into God’s family to be revealed. In fact, having the Spirit as the “firstfruits” **causes** us to groan because we are even more eager to see his work completed—“the very fact that the Spirit is only the ‘first fruits’ makes us sadly conscious that we have ‘not yet’ severed all ties to the old age of sin and death” (Moo, 543). This revelation will take place on the day when our bodies are resurrected, and we begin to represent our Father perfectly.
 - Paul associates “**hope**” with both the condition of creation (v. 20) and the believer (v. 24). It would not be “hope” if we already possessed it (v. 24), but since this “hope” is something that God has promised us, we can persevere in waiting eagerly for it (v. 25).

⁶³ The word translated “**firstfruits**” could be used for the first installment of something larger (e.g., the first portion of a harvest). The word also appears in Rom 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15; and 2 Thess 2:13. The first installment assumed that something greater was following it. Here, Paul is saying that the Spirit in our lives is the “first installment and guarantee of the eschatological redemption, i.e., the resurrection” (NIDNTTE, 1:347).

- It is not clear what Paul means by the phrase “**in this hope we were saved**” (v. 24). It could be that he is using “hope” as something of a synonym with faith (i.e., the instrument by which we receive salvation), but this does not seem to be supported by other NT passages which speak of our salvation. Most English versions assume that it refers to the manner in which we were saved; that is, our salvation is characterized by hope (“hope has been a part of what our salvation involves from the beginning,” *EBR*, 123). Alternatively, but similar to the previous option, Paul could be referring to the context in which we are saved—“Just as Abraham expressed his faith in the context of the hope that God would make him the father of many nations, even if that meant giving life to the dead (4:17), so those who believe the gospel express their faith within the context of hope for the resurrection of the dead (8:11) and deliverance from slavery to decay (8:21)” (Thielman, 406). In either case, God’s promises are our “hope” and this sure “hope” sustains us through suffering.
- Our textbook helpfully summarizes the final paragraph (vv. 26–30) in this section: “Paul tells us three things that God is doing to support us in our time of patient waiting. We might summarize these... as (1) prayer (vv. 26–27), (2) providence (v. 28), and predestination (vv. 29–30)” (*EBR*, 123).
 - “**In the same way,**” which begins **verse 26**, connects what Paul is about to say regarding prayer with what he has just said in **verses 24–25** about hope. Hope sustains us during suffering, and the Spirit also sustains us in suffering. He does this by interceding for us when “**we do not know what we ought to pray for.**” Our problem is often that we do not know what to pray (i.e., the content) when we face difficulties.⁶⁴ At these times, the Spirit comes to our aid. The Spirit’s intercession is described as “groanings too deep for words” (NASB) or “**wordless groans**” (NIV). This “groaning” does not seem to refer to the sign gift of tongues since it is evidently something that the Spirit does for all believers (cf. 1Cor 12:30). Furthermore, these are “wordless” or “unspoken” groanings, and they are “groanings” of the Spirit, not the believer. This is not something we are doing. Paul is likely using “groaning” metaphorically here as he did when he was speaking of creation “groaning” in verse 22. However, the metaphor still describes something real that the Spirit does for the believer. When we do not know what to pray, we can be assured that the Spirit is praying along with us and for us. The Father and the Spirit are in perfect harmony, so we can be confident that the Spirit knows exactly what to ask of the Father (v. 27).

⁶⁴ “It is not our ignorance of the right manner of prayer that is reflected on... It is rather our ignorance respecting the proper conduct—we know not what to pray as the exigencies of our situations demand” (Murray, 1:311).