

The I in Romans 7 is Paul Pre-Conversion Experience  
 BI-4410 Romans  
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When Paul describes his infamous struggle with sin in Romans 7:14-25, who does he (I/ego) represent? Does the “I” refer to Paul himself, or another (Adam, Eve, Cain, Israel)? Is Paul describing a pre- or post-conversion?

Humanity has always struggled with its morality since the fall of Adam and Eve, but the revelation of God’s law reveals that morality does not come from rules. Many Christians see the passage of Romans 7 as Paul’s experience as a Christian believer that struggles with sin. The view that ego is post-conversion seems to relate everyday experiences to those who profess Christ and the Christian is powerless to sin until they receive resurrected bodies. However, Paul’s experience that law never delivered him out of the power of sin as Torah observer and he was powerless to obey the law. Paul states there is the way of the Spirit and the way of the flesh that one tries to seek righteousness. Why is Paul struggling with sin and delighting in the law as a believer? Paul as a Torah observer was unable to uphold the Mosaic law and was unable to overcome the law of sinful nature that is found in his Flesh. If Paul is using the “I” in the present tense, does that mean that Paul is not talking about his current state as Paul, the Christ follower? “I” in the present tense can be poetic flashback so the reader can experience his previous struggle with sin. The post-conversion view is likely incorrect because Romans 7 is talking about Paul’s pre-conversion experience as Torah law observer.

There are about six views that I will address who the I is in Romans 7? Is the “I” Adam? Does “Paul speak as a human being, caught up in Adam’s representative transgression of God’s law and its terrible consequence?” (*Encounter*, 108). I believe that is not a case because Gentiles do not delight in the law of God. Is the “I” Israel? Does “Paul speaks of the history of his people,

for whom he meant not life but death?” (108). Is the “I” Paul? Yes, Paul is describing his own experience. Was it, “his experience as an unconverted Jew under the law?... or after Paul post conversion sought sanctification through the law or as a mature Christian?” (109). The evidence supports the position that Paul is describing his as a Torah observer to show new believers that the law is not the basis of righteousness but grace through faith. The absence of the Spirit in Romans 7 indicates that the view is proceeding to conversion which is experience in the life of the Spirit in Romans 8.

The passage that we are going to explore is about the law and Torah Observer that includes Jews and Gentiles that came to faith in Judaism. That a hope in God sought the law to find righteousness in the law, but Paul does see the law as the means of God’s righteousness.

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin.” (Romans 7:14-25, *ESV*).

There is compelling evidence supporting the view of a pre-conversion experience.

Paul statement is not about the law of Moses that believers seek to find righteousness by rather Paul’s and Torah observers’ experience. Paul never says that a Christian’s average experience is to live in the realm of the Flesh, but rather a Christian is to walk in the realm of the Spirit.

Paul's struggle in Romans 7:14-25 is about the struggle in the flesh is not the typical experience for the Christian in the New Testament. In Romans 7:14, Paul says "for we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin, for I do not understand my actions" (ESV). Paul acknowledges that the law was from God, but the absence of the Spirit of God left him powerless to uphold the law of Moses. Paul sees that the flesh is the body that is subject to the curse of sin and is powerless to obey the law of Moses. Schreiner argues, "The structure supports pre-Christian experience in two ways... The simplest way of understanding the structure suggests that Paul is describing of unbelievers in verses 14-25, for 7:7-25 elaborates on 7:5, which portrays unregenerate experience, and 8:1-17 unpacks 7:6, which relays the liberating work of the Spirit" (*The Epistle*, 108). Unregenerate Torah believer in God that delights in the law of God; that could mean Scripture since the Torah is the first five books of the Bible. Another meaning is that the law was the only provided means to receive forgiveness through the atonement of animals.

Schreiner's explains his view even further by, "the law exacerbates the problem of sin. The person who attempts to obey the law realizes how important and incapable of obedience he or she is. Thus, the law sharpens a person's sense of inadequacy and even stimulates sin" (*The Law*, 90). The law brought increase sin and had the reverse effect because it was unable to give the power to rescue Torah observer like Paul from the curse of sin. The curse of sin brought the nature of flesh, which was sinful and was unable to save one from the sin.

The person is powerless without the Spirit of God to overcome sin because the law cannot enable a person that is under the curse of the sinful nature. In Romans 7:18-19; Paul's words "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For Paul says, I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. I do not do the good I want, but the

evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (*ESV*). Paul as a Jew did experience the desire, which came from the body with the five senses and that the flesh was a source of sin. The body is not redeemed in this life but following God’s commandments requires the spirit of God. The text leaves out the Spirit of God in the struggle of sin because it was Paul’s pre-conversation that allow him to show the desire. Paul explains that he did not have the ability as a Jew to overcome the temptation of sin because he did not keep the law.

The way of the law intend was to be kept entirely or else; the person would fall under the curse of sin. Schreiner’s explanation is “for Paul, God’s transcendent purpose in giving the law was to increase sin, for the multiplication of transgressions would demonstrate that no one could be righteous through obeying the law. Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ” (91). The law was not evil itself, but instead, it was an instrument to point to the need for a savior. Freedom from sin was not found in the law of God, but freedom from the power of sin was the work of Jesus Christ; being the only person able to meet the demands of the law and be able to become the ultimate substitute for humans.

The struggle of sin is over on the cross because Jesus lives up to the demands of the law and for God gives the Spirit of God that enables the believers the power to overcome sin. Jesus sets free from sin those under the law and provide full freedom and escape the sinful body (flesh); also make the body holy when he resurrects the believer. The reason, why Paul says at the end of Romans, “O Wretch Man? Who would deliver me?” (*ESV*). Jesus work at the cross brings the forgiveness of sin, and it can deliver the body from sin and death. Jesus will redeem the body that is mortal and tempted by the sinful nature. Once Christ transforms the body, and it will not be tempted by the presence of sinful nature.

The desires of the flesh come from three sources; 1 John 2:16 John says, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (*ESV*). The context reveals that believers that desire for sin will come from these three sources which deal with the five senses of the body. God has redeemed the inner man, but God does not yet redeem our bodies; However, because the body has not been redeemed yet, but it does not mean born again believers cannot carry out the law of Christ. The born-again believer can live out the commandments of God by loving God and people. The ability to carry it out has been given to believers because Christ has destroyed the works of Satan. The Romans 7 passage best describe a Torah observer that is seeking to live righteous thought the means of the Mosaic Law. The clues are that the believer delights in the law, but no mention of the Spirit of God is mention.

Cranfield’s opposing view of that chapter seven divides into two parts; one where Paul is Torah observer in the first half of Romans 7 but the second is the present experience that Paul’s struggle with sin even as a regenerate Christian. Cranfield’s view that the “ego” is Paul in the present tense as an Apostle of God who struggles with the flesh (sinful nature). The ego or “I” is in the present tense to show that Paul is speaking to his current struggle with sin. The reason that grace is what saves a person, and no one can become holy because of his only solely on the grace of God. However, the question is how does one overcome the struggle of sin?

Cranfield’s position on sanctification is that it is progressive in till the resurrection because sin will never cease to dominate the person. When Paul used the term “other law at work” he could be using “the word law metaphorically, to denote exercised power, authority over us is a terrible travesty, a grotesque parody of that authority over us which belongs by right to God’s holy law. Sin exercising such authority over us is a hideous usurpation of the

prerogative of God's law" (*Cranfield*, 364). Sin has the authority through the law over human since the law become the tool of sin to condemn humans. The tool of law without the Spirit of God could never save a person, and the law cannot save today, but a believer's salvation is found in faith in Jesus Christ. Cranfield sees sanctification of the believer as progressive because sin is not defeated in the lives of the believer but can only be defeated once Christ saves the believer from the body of sin. The believer even "with this sense of commitment to God's will that this conclusion does not cloak the painful fact of continuing sinfulness, but goes on to acknowledge frankly that the Christian, so long he remains in a real sense a slave of sin since he still has a sinful nature" (370). Can a Christ follower today be holy in the body?

In Cranfield's view, Christian cannot be genuinely being holy because the Holy Spirit has only cleansed his spirit, but the soul and body are in the progressive sanctification but will never reach full sanctification in till the resurrection or death. The sinful nature or the sinful flesh has entirely been put to death because the inner man has not thoroughly cleansed from sin. An example is that God is allowing nature to change day by day and progresses to be better, but yet the believer sins daily. The progressive salvation view implies that the believer could not escape the domination of sin because one awaits the perfection that only comes with a resurrected glorified body.

Moo shows, "Cranfield is representative of those who argue that his language can appropriately be applied to Christian, since the Christian continues to be sinful, and can, therefore, be said to be "under sin" (*Moo*, 454). Christians under sin and are not free from sin because the power of sin is never destroyed in the life of the believer. The "ego" in Cransfield view is that Paul as a believer struggles with sin, but the grace of God has saved me and nature is

changed daily, but the body awaits for ultimate freedom. When does freedom from sin come to live a believer?

The evidence that Cranfield presents is “the first-person singular but now for the first time in this chapter with a present tense. The only natural way to understand is surely the way indicated by Calvin’s comment on the following verse. John Calvin’s explanation, “Paul is depicting in his person the character and extent of the weakness of believers” (*Cranfield*, 356). The strongest evidence Cranfield gives is that present tense “I” or “ego” show that Paul is not talking as a past tense but rather talking about the present tense. The climax of the post-conversion view, the Greek “I” or “ego” is the present tense that creates a problem for my view pre-conversion view. I will explain Cranfield’s view first that the “I” give further evidence to the post-conversion view that aligns that Paul is talking about himself in the present tense and to believers as the typical experience. The law of God which means Torah is also the scripture that Paul used to delight in God. Torah is the Scriptures as well that Paul delight in the Hebrew Scriptures and his mind renewed in the Spirit, but sin is not a presence but also dominating because the flesh carries the sinful nature in the believer. Cranfield’s view shows that Paul is looking towards the past-life as a Jewish Torah follower, but instead, he is looking at his present live as Apostle Paul that was an imperfect believer. Paul sees righteousness something that is growing inside of the Apostle, but yet desires of sin have entirely gone away. Paul has lost the battle to the sinful nature when he tries to renew his mind through the Scriptures.

An objection to Cranfield’s view that Roman’s seven views that are Paul’s post-conversion do not consist with the rest of Romans and the teaching of the Bible. God commands the New Testament to be righteousness but the command not to symbolically righteousness. God calls people righteousness to obey the Law of Christ, which is to love God and love people. How

is the righteousness found? The person is not able to find this righteousness in themselves or through the law of God, but it is found in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Is Christ sanctifying work finish or ongoing?

The Finished Work's view is that Christ has cleansed the inner man and now there is no sinful nature but only body that is tempted by sin. The believer has not two nature, but just the divine nature enables the believer to carry out the commandments of Jesus Christ. The Finish Work view of sanctification is that God has changed nature already and nature is being made new because it already been made new. The believer is born into the new nature, and the believer is to learn to walk their new nature; the same way that a child is growing in learning to speak and walk is the same to the born-again believer. The born-again believer that walks in the Spirit fulfills the law of love and bears the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of believers.

The Finished Work's view makes sense but how does pre-conversion view make sense in the light that if Paul is speaking in the present tense, not the past tense? The best way to explain that question is a retrospective view that Paul is using I in his past life as a Jew but now with his new found understanding as a Christian. Wilder explains, "in Romans 7:7:25, Paul describes his pre-conversion past in the way that he sees it now, not in the way he saw it then. Such redescription of the past from a present perspective is typical of the behavior termed "biographical reconstruction" by sociologist of conversion" (Wilder, 96). Paul is biographical reconstruction to give a secondary application to Christian who is trying to seek righteousness using the law. How is Paul present "I" a biographical reconstruction?

Paul is using the "I" in the present tense to be able to have a flashback to his life as a Jew who was committed to the Torah. Paul using his understand that law will not justify anyone in the flesh because Christ was the end of the law; because Christ met the demands of the law of



God. The evidence that biographical reconstruction because it has no mention of the Spirit of God and the body always been enslaved by sin. In the New Testament, believers do not delight in the law of God but rather walk in the Spirit of God. The delight in the law of God is the Old Testament term that shows that Paul is speaking about his struggle with sin before he becomes a Christ. There is no mention of the Spirit of God but at every end of Romans 7 looks to Old Testament hope of the resurrection.

The resurrection of the believer is found holy in Christ; who can deliver Paul from the body of sin. “Once the nature of Rom 7:7-25 as a piece of biographical reconstruction is recognized. It becomes apparent that 7:7-13 reflects upon the experience of those deceived by sin. Such impotence on the part of the law is mirrored by that of the self who in 7:14-25. Who delights in the law of God wishes to do good, but he finds nothing good instead evil that follows deception is achieved day by day. It is an unrecognized sin” (Wilder, 96-97). Paul as a Jew was deceived that righteousness could achieve by the law and his new understanding as a born-again Christian is that he was wrong. The deception that righteousness found in the law was not so because true righteousness came from faith in Jesus Christ. Paul was able to put to death the deeds of the flesh because Paul was alive by the Spirit of God to live out righteousness.

“I” in the present tense can be poetic flashback so the reader can experience his — Paul’s redescription of the past struggle of sin from a present perspective. I took the position that Paul his describing his as a pre-conversion Torah observer to show that new believer that the law is not the basis of righteousness but grace through faith. The absence of the Spirit in Romans 7 shows that the view is proceeding to conversion which is experience in the life of the Spirit in Romans 8.. Cranfield’s view that the “*ego*” is Paul in the present tense as an Apostle of God who struggles with the flesh (sinful nature). The ego or “I” is in the present tense so that to show that

Paul is speaking to the current struggle with sin. What the difference progressive salvation and complete salvation? The progressive salvation view implies that the believer could not escape the domination of sin because one awaits the perfection that only comes with a resurrected glorified body.

An objection to Cranfield's view because finished work view is more consisted; that believer is born into the new nature, and the believer is to learn to walk their new nature. The same way that a child is growing in learning to speak and walk is the same as the born-again believer. The born-again believer that walks in the Spirit fulfills the law of love and bears the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of believers. The Finished Work view is supported by evidence of Scripture but how does pre-conversion view make sense in the light that if Paul is speaking in the present tense, not the past tense? The best way to explain that question is a retrospective view that Paul is using I in his past life as a Jew but now with his new found understanding as a Christian. The evidence that Paul is speaking about his past life as a Jew with the present understanding of Christian insight he has now. The "I" is a flashback that shows the past with the understanding of the present. The pre-conversation makes the most sense in light of the context of Romans and Apostle's teaching. The post-conversion view is not supported by scriptural evidence because Romans 7 is talking about Paul's pre-conversion experience as Torah law observer. The progressive salvation view implies that the believer could not escape the domination of sin because one awaits the perfection that only comes with a resurrected glorified body. The Bible says that we are new creations to be able to live out God's commandments. In 2nd Corinthians 5:17, Paul's statement, "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (*ESV*).

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