

“The Performance Treadmill” (Romans 7:7–25)

This past week my children started a new job walking our neighbor’s dogs. Fortunately, these two dogs are small and easy to walk. However, I know this isn’t the case with all dogs. Perhaps you’ve seen someone walking a dog on a leash when the dog doesn’t want to go where its owner is going? The owner is constantly tugging on the leash pulling the dog back from here and there and telling it to stop and start. That’s the way a lot of Christians live. They’re on a “Law leash.” Their lives consist of, “stop that; come back here; don’t do that,” only it’s in terms of, “read your Bible; pray; witness; go to church; serve; be Christ-like.” Now, there’s nothing wrong with these things. They are all biblical. But God never meant us to do them at the end of a leash! What a difference it is when you see a dog and its owner have a strong relationship. The dog doesn’t need the leash to go for a walk. Its owner can just speak a word and the dog responds. I’m not comparing you to a dog. Rather, I’m comparing performance to relationship.¹

For years I’ve been on a “Law leash.” I’ve tried to perform spiritually by reading my Bible, praying, witnessing, serving, and being Christ-like. I’ve always assumed that I’ve been driven by my love for God. Yet, over the years I’ve sensed the failure and frustration of trying to measure up to my own expectations. It’s not the expectations of others as much as it is my own quest for excellence. Like a recovering alcoholic, I could say, “Hi, my name is Keith and I’m a legalist” (hopefully a recovering legalist). Perhaps you’re unfamiliar with the term legalism? Legalism is “that fleshly attitude which conforms to a code in order to glorify self.”² It is anything done in self-effort and human ability apart from the enablement of the Holy Spirit. This includes the spiritual disciplines and Christian qualities like kindness and gentleness done in our own power. It can even be controlling our anger in self-effort. Yet, anything done apart from the Spirit is displeasing to God. What a sobering reality for those of us who do so many “Christian” things without really drawing on strength from the Lord.³

In Romans 7:7–25⁴ Paul shares his experience as a recovering legalist.⁵ Admittedly, this is one of the most disputed passages in the Bible.⁶ Various suggestions for the “I” in question have been proposed: an unbeliever, a mature believer, or a hypothetical believer, Israel, Adam, or even humankind in general. Every view has strengths and weaknesses, but I believe the least problematic view is that Paul is sharing his former struggle to mix grace and Law.⁷ The challenge Paul issues is: *Throw off your Law leash!* In this text, Paul explains two biblical fundamentals to live the Christian life.

1. We can’t please God by serving the Law (7:7–12). Even though the Law is a wonderful tool, it is not a means of pleasing God. In 7:7–8 Paul corrects a possible misunderstanding about the Law and then reveals one of its purposes. He writes: **“What shall we say then?⁸ Is the Law sin?⁹ May it never be!¹⁰ On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law;¹¹ for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COVET.’¹² But sin, taking opportunity¹³ through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.”¹⁴** Right from the get-go, Paul wants to make sure we understand that the Law is not sin.¹⁵ In fact in 7:7 he gives one of the benefits of the Law: The Law reveals sin. Without the Law, Paul would not have known (intellectually and experientially) how sinful he was.¹⁶ Interestingly, the apostle refers specifically to the tenth commandment: “You shall not covet.”¹⁷ Coveting is simply craving more of what you have enough of already. Why did Paul choose this particular commandment? Most likely because it convicts the heart! The first nine commandments can be publicly verified. One can demonstrate that he or she has kept the first nine commands because they are external commands. But the tenth and final commandment cannot be verified because it is an internal matter of the heart. So in an external sense, it is hypothetically possible to keep the first nine commandments, but we all must acknowledge that our inner desires are often very wrong.¹⁸ Paul concurs and acknowledges that when he came to understand the true meaning of coveting he went on a sin shopping spree (7:8b).

Let's face it, the Law compels us to sin. This is just how we are wired. Think about the following signs: "Keep off the grass!" "Wet paint!" "Don't touch!" "No trespassing!" "No Fishing!" "No U-Turn!" What do you immediately want to do? Break the law! We love to sin and any law meant to keep us from sin drives us to sin all the more. This is also true biblically speaking. A law such as, "You shall not covet" increases our coveting. Apart from this explicit law the motivation to covet lessens. Without something to rebel against there could be no rebels.¹⁹

In 7:9–11 Paul shares how attempting to obey the Law led to his demise: **"I was once alive²⁰ apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive²¹ and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived²² me and through it killed me."** Verse 9 is the first time in Romans that Paul uses the emphatic "I" (*ego*). He is most likely referring to his own experience as typical of every person.²³ The personal pronouns "I," "my," or "me" appear in the context of 7:7–25 over forty times suggesting an intensely personal struggle. Yet one of the great mysteries and debates of this passage is: When was Paul "once alive apart from the Law?" I think the best answer is: Paul was alive in fellowship with God apart from the Law early in his conversion (6:8, 11, 13).²⁴ However, shortly thereafter, he traveled to Arabia²⁵ to work through his understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and to minister (Gal 1:17). During this time Paul may have begun to combine grace and Law.²⁶ By incorporating the Law into his Christian life, sin revived, and he died. That is, he died experientially when his fallen nature aroused sin to a greater degree severing his fellowship with God.²⁷ Maybe you remember that classic line from the movie *Sandlot*, "You're killing me, Smalls!"²⁸ Well, Paul was likely saying, "You're killing me, Sin!" The death Paul has in mind is despair, agony of defeat, opposite of the abundant life (cf. John 10:10b). As Paul says in 2 Cor 3:6b: "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."²⁹

Paul summarizes this section in 7:12: **"So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."** This is quite an endorsement from a man who has spent much of Romans critiquing the Law. We must, therefore, understand God's purpose for the Law. The purpose of the Law from an Old Testament perspective was twofold: (1) to manifest the glory of God³⁰ and (2) to provide for the good of Israel.³¹ The purpose of the Law from a New Testament perspective was threefold: (1) to reveal sin,³² (2) to drive sinful man to Christ,³³ and (3) to foreshadow Christ.³⁴ It is not that the Law is evil; rather, it is sin that is evil. Congress may enact some bad laws, but not God! The Law is "holy and righteous and good"; we're the ones who pervert it and thereby ruin our walk with Christ.³⁵ Today will you *throw away your Law leash* and fall in love with Jesus? Will you ask Him to help you overcome your legalistic independence? Will you seek not to incorporate Law and grace into your Christian life? Will you remind yourself daily that the Law was not intended for you to keep? *Throw away your Law leash.*

[We can't please God by serving the Law because we are sinners by nature and by choice. We desperately need divine intervention. Now we will learn a second biblical fundamental . . .]

2. We can't please God by serving the flesh (7:13–25).³⁶ Paul now depicts the resulting condition of attempting to please God by keeping the Law. This section chronicles what we could label "the miserable Christian life."³⁷ In Rom 6 the problem was, "How can I stop doing bad things?" The problem here in Rom 7 is, "How can I ever do anything good?"³⁸ In 7:13 Paul writes: **"Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful."** Paul again reiterates: The problem is not the Law—it is sin! In other words, the Law has not caused Paul's death; the Law simply identified sin as being sinful. Without the Law, we would never understand how God views sin. You could say that the Law has opened our eyes to just how utterly sinful we are.

In 7:14–16 Paul explains further why sin is so sinful: **“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand;³⁹ for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.”** Paul explains that the Law is spiritual (cf. 7:12); however, he is “of flesh” (*sarkinos*). The phrase “of flesh” is not the same as being “in the flesh,” which Paul refers to as the pre-conversion state (7:5; 8:8).⁴⁰ Paul is simply saying that even as a believer he is capable of thinking and responding as a mere man (cf. *sarkinos*, 1 Cor 3:3). The phrase “sold into bondage to sin” appears to contradict 6:1–11; however, here in 7:14, Paul is not referring to his *position* but to his former *condition*. The apostle uses the present tense to vividly portray his former struggle in using the Law for sanctification.⁴¹ In Greek grammar, the present tense with “I” can denote a condition without reference to time. The tense form does not communicate time as much as they do a kind of action. The shift (in Greek) from past tense to present tense signals a shift from narrative (7:7–12) to a description of a condition (7:13–25).⁴²

Paul continues his explanation on the sinfulness of sin in 7:17–23. In 7:17 he writes, **“So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”** It’s interesting how Paul distinguishes between himself and indwelling sin. This is an indication that Paul is writing from a saved person’s perspective. The sinful self is not his real self. Paul is a new man in Christ, but the old Paul (i.e., the flesh) is responsible for the sin. Paul is not trying to get out of personal responsibility for his actions. He’s not pulling a Flip Wilson and exclaiming, “The devil (or the flesh) made me do it!” He is distinguishing between the old and new man (cf. 7:20).⁴³ The implication is that he doesn’t *have* to sin because of who he has become. So, *throw off your Law leash!*

Paul shares a tremendous principle in 7:18: **“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”** The problem is very straightforward: Our flesh is contaminated with sin. Our flesh is like the structure of a house that’s been eaten up by termites. You can paint the inside, put down new carpet, and buy new furniture, but you have not fixed the structural problem. Tony Evans says, “The flesh is like a bad in-law; you can’t get rid of it! It just keeps hanging around!”⁴⁴ This will continue to be the case for the rest of our earthly lives. The flesh is with us until God gives us a new body that is free from any of the contamination of sin.

The sinfulness of sin results in spiritual schizophrenia.⁴⁵ In 7:19–23 Paul writes, **“For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”** The new Paul yearns to obey God; the old Paul rebels against God. The Greek word translated “joyfully concur” (7:22) or “delight” (*sunedomai*) is quite strong; from its root we derive our word hedonism. As believers, we delight in God’s Word. Paul would say, “Delight trumps duty.” The phrase “inner man” (*eso anthropon*) refers to the new nature we received at conversion. This phrase is only used of believers in the New Testament (2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16). The problem is there is a spiritual war going on within us. The term rendered “waging war” (*antistrateuomai*) is only used here in the New Testament (7:23). It is a military term indicating the severity of the battle between the law of God and the law of sin.⁴⁶ The believer wages an agonizing war. Did you ever stop to realize that there was no war that raged within you before you became a Christian? Prior to trusting in Jesus, you were shackled in sin. You were a prisoner of the Devil. But once you trusted in Christ, you became an enemy of hell! In your unsaved state, you were absolutely no threat to Satan, but now you are a real threat, and he is going to do everything he can to render you ineffective and unfruitful.

What is Paul's conclusion? Look at 7:24a. Paul cries out, "**Wretched man that I am!**" Paul is in utter anguish! He has reached the place of both self-disgust and self-despair because he has failed to keep the Law due to his sin. The word "wretched" (*talaiporos*) is used only one other place in the New Testament. In Rev 3:17 where Jesus says to the church of Laodicea, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." This is a hard verse, isn't it? In a similar vein, Paul calls himself a "Wretched man," for in his quest to keep the Law he has recognized just how messed up he is. C. S. Lewis said it well, "No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good." This is why God has to break us in order to remake us. He needs to turn the "have to's" into "want to's." As we learn to fall in love with Christ and walk with Him, the Law takes care of itself.

In 7:24b Paul goes on to ask, "**Who will set me free from the body of this death** [or better, "this body of death⁴⁷]?" Notice Paul says, "*Who* will set me free?" not "*What* will set me free?" He isn't looking to rules, rituals, or regulations; He is looking to a person—the Lord Jesus! Always remember that victory doesn't come in a "what" but a "who!" We must recognize that we aren't too weak to overcome temptation; we aren't weak enough. Paul admitted that he was powerless to resolve this problem. You, too, must come to the absolute end of your spiritual rope. You must not make the mistake of assuming that you can live the Christian life by yourself. Your body of sin will drag you down.

The imagery Paul uses here is very interesting. In his day, if you killed someone, one of the ways you might be punished was by having the dead body of your victim tied to your body. You would be face-to-face with the person you killed. When that dead body was tied to you, that cadaver signed your death warrant because as decay set in on the cadaver, it would begin to penetrate the pores of your skin, poisoning your blood, and ultimately killing you. So you were looking death in the face as you dragged a dead body around with you. What you wanted more than anything was to be released from that body. That's a gruesome image, but it pictures well what Paul is saying here. He was dragging around the dead carcass of his sinful flesh. It was dead because it had been put to death by Paul's death with Christ, but it was still weighing him down. You are trapped in your flesh until Christ releases you.⁴⁸

In 7:25 Paul wraps up this passage with some good news and some bad news. He gives the good news first: "**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**"⁴⁹ Paul starts to preach here! He gets excited! He proclaims that we can have victory through "Jesus Christ our Lord!" This brief note of victory is a preview of coming attractions.⁵⁰ Chapter 8 will tell us more. However, there will forever be battle on this side of eternity. Paul reminds us of this in the last sentence of Chapter 7: "**So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.**" Paul cannot overcome sin by his own strength through the Law. He needs a supernatural power. Take a moment and count up how many times the Holy Spirit is mentioned in 7:14–25. How many times is He mentioned? Zero! This is the key to this section. Paul is whetting our appetites for Chapter 8 where the Holy Spirit is mentioned over twenty times!

In the meantime, the Lord wants you to *throw off your Law leash!* You were created and called to experience freedom! Don't succumb to four specific lies that your flesh uses to trap you into a life of legalism, which ultimately leads to despair:⁵¹

- Performance—I must perform up to a certain standard in order to feel good about myself.
- Approval—I must be approved by certain people in order to feel good about myself.
- Blame—someone or something outside myself is the cause of my failures and rejections.
- Shame—there is something wrong with me that can't be repaired; I was born this way and can't change.

God wants to transform you by grace. He wants to set you free from legalism. He wants to move you from an “I ought” or “I should” Christian to an “I want to” Christian. Grace-based Christians obey because it’s their delight. Law-based Christians obey because it’s their duty. Obedience is certainly our duty as Christians,⁵² but duty alone without love behind it can degenerate into routine. Law-based Christians obey and come to resent it.⁵³ Grace-based Christians obey and love it. God wants to overwhelm you with grace, so *throw off your Law leash!*

I am directionally impaired. Honestly, there’s not a directional bone in my body. I’m one of those people who have book sense but not common sense. I can’t even really read a map! I typically use either MapQuest or Google Maps and get step-by-step directions to lead me to my destination. The problem is because of my “fallen” sense of direction, I often botch the directions! It can be utterly humiliating! Trying to follow complicated step-by-step directions is like living by the Law. I have to follow the rules, so to speak, and work it all out for myself. That’s why I love it when someone offers to drive me to my destination. When that happens everything is different. I can throw the directions out the window because someone who knows the way is in control. I can sit back and enjoy the ride. Too many Christians are trying to follow a list of rules to get them where they want to go. Their destination is peace, joy, and victory, but they really don’t know how to get there. If this is your situation, Jesus Christ is inviting you to move over and let Him have the wheel because He can take you where you want to go.⁵⁴

Scripture References

Romans 7:7–25

Romans 13:11–14

1 Corinthians 2:9–10

2 Corinthians 5:17

Galatians 5:16–26

Colossians 3:1–17

1 Peter 2:11–12

Study Questions

1. How has the Old Testament Law helped me recognize my own sin (Rom 7:7–8)? In what way(s) have I struggled with the sin of coveting? Why is this particular sin so inescapable? How does the sin of coveting summarize the Ten Commandments?
2. As a Christian, how have I struggled with legalism or a desire to obey the Law (Rom 7:9–11)? When has this been most apparent in my Christian life? How can I explain Paul's seemingly schizophrenic view of the Law (7:12–13)? How can I balance the positive and negative aspects of the Law?
3. How can I relate to Paul's battle in Rom 7:14–25? Do I still continue to experience similar behavior in relationship to the Old Testament Law or to rules in general? Why has this been such a battle? What has been the outcome in my personal walk with Christ? How can I focus on living by grace?
4. How are Romans 7:14–25 and Galatians 5:16–25 similar? How are they different? Which passage mentions the Holy Spirit? Which passage announces the fulfillment of the Law? What do both texts teach us about living the Christian life?
5. Is there any mention of the Holy Spirit for empowerment in the struggle described in Rom 7:7–25? If not, why? What is the good news of this passage (7:25)? How does this help me in my daily pilgrimage? How does Romans 8 provide a solution to the performance treadmill? How can I articulate God's grace to the believer who is ensnared by legalism?

Notes

¹ Adapted and revised from Tony Evans, *Free at Last* (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 87.

² Charles Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 120.

³ These insights stem from Dr. John F. Hart, Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, personal correspondence 2/11/2011. I've also been especially helped by his unpublished paper: "Paul as Weak in Faith: Romans 7 in Light of the Original Audience." In this paper Hart sees seven signs of a Christian who is "under Law": (1) A greater stress on the outward expressions of faith than on inner character; (2) a focus on the negatives ("don't" commands) rather than on the positives (e.g., love for others); (3) a distinction between various kinds of sins; (4) a conscious or unconscious neglect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit for daily Christian living; (5) a spirit of exclusiveness and superiority (self-righteousness); (6) a focus on steps or formula for Christian living and spiritual victory; and (7) a greater stress on the separation from "sinners" than on a compassion to reach them.

⁴ Hart, "Paul as Weak in Faith" summarizes questions unanswered by most interpretations of Rom 7:7–25: (1) What is the relationship of 7:1–6 to 7:7–25? (2) How does 7:7–25 related to the readers in Rome and the occasion of the book? (3) How does 7:7–25 related to the theme of being "delivered from the power of sin" (1:16)? (author's emphasis)

⁵ This passage is one of the most perplexing passages in the entire Bible. Nygren suggests that Rom 7 "is perhaps the most discussed and fought over part" of Romans. Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949), 284. Moo comments, "And it may be generally said that the interpretation of few passages has been more influenced by one's broad theological perspective, experience, and sheer a priori assumptions than Rom. 7:14–25." Moo also correctly understands how the exegesis of Rom 7 influences theology. "Our identification of the person whose struggle Paul depicts in this text does have an impact on several theological and practical issues. One of the most important of these is the nature of the Christian life." Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 443.

⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 423 rightly summarizes: "Romans 7:7-25, therefore, has two specific purposes: to vindicate the law from any suggestion that it is, in itself, 'sinful' or evil; and to show how, despite this, the law has come to be a negative force in the history of salvation."

⁷ See F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 188–202; Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Impotence of the Law: Toward a Fresh Understanding of Romans 7:14–25." In *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation: Essays Presented to Everett F. Harrison by His Students and Colleagues in Honor of His Seventy-fifth Birthday*. Eds. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 34–48; David Wenham, "The Christian Life: A Life of Tension?—A Consideration of the Nature of Christian Experience in Paul." In *Pauline Studies: Essays presented to Professor F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday*. Eds. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 80–94; Hart, "Paul as Weak in Faith."

⁸ See Rom 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30.

⁹ It is interesting to note there are at least fifteen Hebrew words in the OT for sin. There are about as many different words for it in the Greek NT. Such a rich vocabulary in both Testaments reveals fully what God thinks about sin in all its forms. It is exceedingly wicked.

¹⁰ For Paul's use of this phrase in Romans, see Rom 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11.

¹¹ The NLT attempts to clarify with the rendering: ". . . it was the law that showed me my sin."

¹² The word translated "covet" (*epithumeo*) is a neutral term that describes a desire or longing. Yet, the word often refers to an illegitimate desire and is most often translated "lust." See Paul's other usages in Rom 13:9; 1 Cor 10:6; Gal 5:17; 1 Tim 3:1.

¹³ The word translated "taking opportunity" (*aphorme*) was often used in military and commercial contexts to denote the base of operations for an expedition or war. See BDAG s.v. *aphorme*. See Rom 7:11; 2 Cor 5:12; 11:12; Gal 5:13; 1 Tim 5:14.

¹⁴ Paul has already said that sin exists apart from the Torah (Rom 5:13); therefore, "dead" (*nekros*) here must be used metaphorically as deficient and inactive (BDAG s.v. *nekros* 2).

¹⁵ However, Osborne correctly notes, "The law is not sin, but it is still related to sin." Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 175. Keener seems to agree, "The law was not sin, but merely a catalyst that amplified sinfulness (4:15; 5:13, 20; 6:14; 7:5, 7); sin exploited it." Craig S. Keener, *Romans*. A New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 88.

¹⁶ Osborne, *Romans*, 175.

¹⁷ See Exod 20:17 and Deut 5:21. Osborne, *Romans*, 175 notes, “Covetousness was widely regarded as the core of the 10 Commandments and of the Torah in Judaism (cf. 4 Maccabees 2:6; Jas 1:15).” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 434–35 comments: “It may still be, of course, that Paul cites this commandment because he himself had experienced the full force of the law through it. But this is certainly not the only explanation. The citation of the prohibition of coveting in general (without naming the objects of the coveting) has Jewish antecedents, where it stands as a representative summation of the Mosaic Law. This, rather than any personal reasons (for which there is no evidence elsewhere), may be why Paul cites this commandment.” See also Lopez who argues that Paul uses the last of the 10 Commandments to stand for the whole Law by synecdoche. René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 148.

¹⁸ It’s possible that James had this commandment in mind when he wrote in Jas 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”

¹⁹ Augustine’s *Confessions* tells us that as a boy he and his friends would steal pears, not because they liked them, but simply for the joy of breaking the law. Also, Mark Twain said that, like a mule, a person will do the opposite of what they are told “just for the sake of meanness.” See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 280.

²⁰ BDAG s.v. *zao* 2: “to function after being dormant, *spring into life*.”

²¹ The only other NT use of *anazao* (“to come alive again”) is Luke 15:24. It is likely that a better rendering is found in the NRSV and NKJV: “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived.”

²² Paul is the only NT writer who uses the verb *exapatao* (“to deceive”): Rom 7:11; 16:18; 1 Cor 3:18; 2 Cor 11:3; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 2:14.

²³ Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith,” argues that the following reasons support this identification. (1) Paul uses an emphatic “I” eight times in Rom 7:7–25 (vs. 9, 10, 14, 20 [2 times], 24, 25), emphasizing personal identity. These eight uses include the emphatic phrase *autos ego* (“I myself”) in 7:25. This phrase is also employed in 9:3 where there is no debate that the reference is autobiographical. It is unlikely that the use of the phrase in Romans 7 is rhetorical and its use in Romans 9 is autobiographical. (2) The confessional language of the passage would be rather artificial and theatrical if the description were not autobiographical. (3) In biblical examples where the first person is used but does not imply the author’s personal experience (1 Cor 6:15; 13: 1–3; Gal 2:18; Rom 3:7), the construction is invariable hypothetical or involving a rhetorical question. Even Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 428, n. 12 acknowledges, “Pauline usage, coupled with the weakness of the alleged parallels to Rom. 7 in a ‘purely rhetorical’ sense, are leading more and more scholars to insist that, whatever the *egō* [‘I’] in Rom. 7 represents, or whatever events may lie in the background, some reference to Paul himself must be included.”

²⁴ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 150; Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith.” Wallace also believes that Paul is referring to his life as a believer. However, he appears to take the view that Paul is writing in a universal sense to both believers and unbelievers. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 392.

²⁵ The only other time Arabia is mentioned in the NT is in reference to the Law (Gal 4:25).

²⁶ Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith” writes, “Paul ‘went away’ from grace to law . . . and ‘returned once more’ to grace.”

²⁷ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 149–50.

²⁸ Steve Elkins, *The Roman Road Revisited* (Dallas: Allie Grace Books, 2005), 100.

²⁹ Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith” aptly states, “A consistent theology of grace must not only be concerned about the role of grace in justification . . . it must *also* be concerned about the role of grace in sanctification.”

³⁰ See Exod 19:5–6; Lev 19:2; Deut 4:6–8; 10:17–19.

³¹ See Deut 10:12–13 and 28:1–14.

³² See Rom 7:5; 1 Cor 15:56; Gal 3:19.

³³ See Rom 10:4; Gal 3:19, 22–25.

³⁴ See Luke 24:27, 44–45; John 5:39, 46; Rom 15:3–4; Col 2:17; Heb 10:1.

³⁵ As Stott states, “Indeed the extreme sinfulness of sin is seen precisely in the way it exploits a good thing (the law) for an evil purpose (death).” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 204.

³⁶ Rom 7:13 starts a new paragraph. It is a question similar to 7:7.

³⁷ Eaton writes, “It [Rom 7:14] cannot be the Christian at his or her best. The Christian who is what he or she ought to be is not miserable, not defeated, and not asking ‘who’ can save him.” However, Eaton concludes that Paul is

talking about an atypical, unconverted person. Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 125.

³⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), 537.

³⁹ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 152 writes: “Whereas Paul previously used the aorist and imperfect tenses, from vv 14–25, Paul will consistently use the present tense to indicate vividly the struggle the infant Christian has with sin in light of using the Law for sanctification. One should *not* understand this section as the normal Christian experience, but the experience of a struggling Christian who tries to control sin by inappropriate use of the Law . . .” Stott, *Romans*, 210 poignantly applies these verses for us: “The right way of applying Romans 7–8 is to recognize that some church-goers today might be termed ‘Old Testament Christians’. The contradiction implied in this expression indicates what an anomaly they are. They show signs of new birth in their love for the church and the Bible, yet their religion is law, not gospel; flesh, not Spirit; the ‘oldness’ of slavery to rules and regulations, not the ‘newness’ of freedom through Jesus Christ. They are like Lazarus when he first emerged from the tomb, alive but still bound hand and foot. They need to add to their life liberty.”

⁴⁰ See also John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 526; Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith.”

⁴¹ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 152–53.

⁴² The shift from past tense to present tense is only valid if Rom 7:7–13 describes Paul’s non-Christian experience. See Hart, “Paul as Weak in Faith.”

⁴³ See the following contrast:

Romans 7:17—“no longer I but sin.” This is THE CRY OF DEFEAT!

Galatians 2:20—“no longer I but Christ.” This is THE CRY OF VICTORY!

See Middletown Bible Church, “Romans Chapter 7 The Believer’s Relationship to the Law”:

www.middletownbiblechurch.org/romans/romans7.htm.

⁴⁴ Tony Evans, *The Promise* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 384.

⁴⁵ Stedman said after reading this that Paul must have been a golfer because all golfers know that what you want to do you do not do, and what you do not want to do, that is the very thing you do. Ray Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, Vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1981), 190.

⁴⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 166.

⁴⁷ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 296–97; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 466 n. 83.

⁴⁸ Evans, *The Promise*, 176. For a fuller description of the historicity behind this illustration, see Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Holman NT Commentary on Romans*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Holman, 2000), 232–233.

⁴⁹ See 2 Cor 2:14: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

⁵⁰ Osborne, *Romans*, 190.

⁵¹ Adapted and revised from Dave Anderson, “Tar Baby” (Rom 7:18–25): unpublished sermon notes.

⁵² See Luke 17:10 where Jesus says, “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.’”

⁵³ Evans, *Free at Last*, 79.

⁵⁴ Adapted and revised from Evans, *Free at Last*, 87–88.