

Knox Theological Seminary

Ongoing Battle

The lexical and syntactical clues which offer a nuanced cohesive
interpretation to Romans 7.14-25

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Introduction and Limitations to Study

Perhaps few other passages in the New Testament have incited more disputes within orthodox Christian circles than Rom. 7.14-25. Though some have tried to portray this passage as if it were a straightforward hermeneutical puzzle, rarely have such portrayals provided a sufficient syntactical analysis. The tendency among many New Testament exegetes is either to say too much about a given unit by using the unaffected morpho-syntactic meaning, or to say too little which leaves room for needless ambiguity. Rather than relying on presupposed theological dogma to interpret puzzling texts, proper exegesis relies on grammatically-clear examples in the Scripture in order to form a proper morpho-syntactic framework which may be implemented when interpreting unclear texts. It is within such a framework that I hope to propose a unifying interpretation for Rom. 7.14-25.

This study will be limited to answering two questions: (i) Does the Apostle Paul speak autobiographically or gnomically? (ii) Does this passage refer to the experience of the unregenerate or the regenerate man? Using clues from the lexicon and syntax within these verses and other Pauline writings, it is most probable that the Apostle Paul sought to broadly *represent* the sanctification process common to all those vitally regenerated *by* recounting his personal experience of sanctification. In other words, this passage functions *both* gnomically *and* autobiographically in order to describe the experience of the regenerate man.

Presentation of Various Interpretations

From the time Paul's Epistle to the Romans was circulated there have been a number of theories about this passage in particular. Regardless of interpretation, this passage necessitates a

unique interpretation which is seldom used anywhere throughout the rest of the New Testament corpus. One thing that can be agreed upon by all exegetes is the universality of the truths which the Apostle advances. As Hodge put it, “That he [Paul] does not speak for himself *only*; that it is not anything in his own individual experience, peculiar to himself, is obvious from the whole context, and is almost universally admitted.”¹ A prominent clue for the gnomic interpretation of this passage is found in v.14. While most uses of οἶδα (perfect tense) have no aspectual significance (cf. Rom. 7.18) and should be treated as a perfect with present force, the generic subject, νόμος, in this verse provides the grounds to interpret οἶδαμεν as gnomic rather than simply as a perfect with present force.² Metzger agrees with the broader usage of οἶδαμεν in the Apostle’s writings to indicate gnomic ideas by saying, “The plural οἶδαμεν is a typical expression which the apostle uses when he refers to a commonly acknowledged truth.”³

So the question is not about whether this text functions as a gnomic device, but whether it functions *only* as a gnomic device. And beyond this question another remains as to whether Paul speaks about the experience of the regenerate or unregenerate man. There is little broad-based agreement upon this issue. Some of the theories still held today are: (1) Paul uses the historical present to dramatize his past unregenerate life and thus this passage represents the unregenerate man. (2) Paul speaks representatively for the unregenerate Jewish people before and after the law of Moses was given *and* is thus not speaking in an autobiographical sense. (3) Paul speaks representatively of anyone, both regenerate and unregenerate, who attempts to please God by submitting the flesh to the law and is therefore not speaking in an autobiographical sense. (4) Paul speaks representatively of the regenerate believer within the sanctification process *by*

¹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans* (East Peoria: Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), 222.

² Wallace, *Grammar*, 580.

³ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd edition (United Bible Societies, 1971), 514.

recounting his own experience. Each of the first three views will be briefly discussed, with the fourth treated at length, being the one defended by this author.

(1) *Historical present view* - While this viewpoint has strengths in describing this passage as *both* gnomic *and* autobiographical, it does so on the basis of limited grammatical evidence. A contemporary advocate for the historical present view can be found in the thesis of R.L. Shive of Dallas Theological Seminary, “The Use of the Historical Present and Its Theological Significance”. This view argues that Paul speaks both gnomically and autobiographically of the pre-regenerate state. Of the four views listed, this argument has the weakest grammatical support. Throughout the New Testament historical presents are used for discourse markers, vividness (especially in the gospels, particularly Mark), and stereotypical Semitic idioms with reduced markedness (such as with λέγει in the gospels). Unless one confuses a present retained in indirect discourse for the historical present (as in John 4.1), there is *not a single case* of the historical present being used for first person or stative verbs throughout the entire New Testament. Semantically speaking, the historical present is found *only* in narrative literature with third person, indicative, non-stative verbs.⁴ *Not once* is it used in the first person. Therefore, it is highly unlikely to be used in this passage. This viewpoint falls on many grammatical fronts and fails to produce worthy exegetical evidence for its consideration.

(2) *Gnomic Israel only view* - The next view perceives that Paul speaks representatively for the unregenerate Jewish people before and after the law of Moses was given and is thus not speaking in an autobiographical sense.⁵ While this certainly has contextual strengths which account for the history of redemption, it also has weaknesses. Using their systematic grounding,

⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 526-529.

⁵ Proponents of this view Grotius, Locke, Estius, Reiche, Cranfield, Feuillet, Käsemann, Theissen, Goodrich, Moo, Wright, Karlberg, Watson.

proponents of this view maintain that Paul could not have referred to himself as being “sold under sin,” and so this passage cannot be autobiographical. Chang argues that the ἐγώ in Romans 7 is uniquely gnomic and simply represents “the situation of those Jews and Judaizing Christians who unavailingly seek justification and holiness by observing the Mosaic Law. Here Paul is most probably looking back upon his own experience as a Pharisaic rabbi.”⁶

Likewise, Goodrich connects Isaiah 50.1 with Romans 7.14 concluding that this passage is uniquely gnomic in nature and refers to the *pre-regenerate* state:

Largely assuming, based on other studies, that ἐγώ stands for unbelieving Paul as a representative of Israel... Paul portrays his initial encounter with Torah by alluding to Israel’s receipt of the law at Sinai. Similarly, in Rom 7.14-25 Paul uses words and themes from LXX Isa 49.24–50.2 to portray his continued struggle to keep the law as one surviving under the power of sin. Collectively, these Isaianic echoes evoke notions of Israel’s Babylonian captivity and thereby provide narratological continuity to the historical-scriptural allusions commonly identified in Rom 7.7-13. In short, just as Israel’s early (Sinaic) and later (Babylonian) history is marked by deception, death, and exile, so Paul’s own experience under the law, due to sin’s disabling power, produced the very same disastrous results, amounting to a condemned state.⁷

But Philonenko, Goodrich’s predecessor and the brain behind an Isianic connection with Romans 7, provides a compelling connection between the phrase, πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, and that which is used in Isaiah 50.1 of the LXX. By doing so, Philonenko reasons that Paul

⁶ Chang, Hae-Kyung. “The Christian Life in a Dialectical Tension? Romans 7:7-25 Reconsidered.” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2007): 257–80.

⁷ John K. Goodrich, “Sold under Sin: Echoes of Exile in Romans 7.14-25,” *Cambridge Vol.59*, Iss.4 (October 2013): 495.

could be referring to himself as living in the captivity of the flesh while waiting for the future fulfillment of his resurrection body.⁸ In other words, though Paul is freed from the penalty and power of sin, he is still enslaved to the presence of sin. This thought will be visited later on.

Apart from Philonenko's assessment, the greatest issue with this perspective arises with the use of οἶδαμεν in v.14. If the Apostle Paul were speaking figuratively in vv.7-13 by using first person *singular* language, there would be no need for the intrusion of the typical gnomic first person plural language at the beginning of verse 14. If he were already portraying himself as a representative of Adam or Israel, why would there be a need to introduce the gnomic οἶδαμεν in v.14? Further than that, what do proponents of this view make of the change from perfect verbal aspect in vv.7-13 to the imperfect verbal aspect in vv.14-25?⁹ All these questions will prove that there seems to be too much of a distinction made by Paul to simply interpret verse 14 as a continuation of the vv.7-13. Οἶδαμεν in v.14 clearly intends to show a serious shift in the Apostle Paul's logic from the unregenerate experience to the regenerate experience. Perhaps the difficulties presented by οἶδαμεν to the supporter of this view this is why Reiche promoted the wording of the 9th century miniscule manuscript 33 since it divided the first word in v.14 as οἶδα (first person singular) μέν rather than οἶδαμεν (first person plural). Adherence to this particular variant conveniently protects this interpretation from this puzzling change in pronouns.

(3) *Gnomic humanity only view* - The third view is promoted by Daniel Wallace when he says that , “the apostle is speaking as universal man and is describing the experience of anyone who attempts to please God by submitting the flesh to the law. By application, this could be true

⁸ Marc Philonenko, “Sur l’expression ‘vendu au péché’ dans l’Épître aux Romains,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* no.203 (1986): 41–45.

⁹ For the disavowment of any significance to the change in verbal aspect in Romans 7, see Chang, Hae-Kyung. “The Christian Life in a Dialectical Tension? Romans 7:7-25 Reconsidered.” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2007): 271–72.

of an unbeliever or a believer.”¹⁰ Further agreement can be found in Iron’s *Syntax Guide* when he says, “Paul’s use of the first person is *not autobiographical* but a rhetorical device called *προσωποποιια* in which the ‘I’ represents a typical character.”¹¹ Leenhardt writes that Paul is writing, “...not of an individual case, but of the case of man in general, of all the heirs of Adam considered in their collective condition.”¹² On the basis of the perceived structural independence of this passage, Longenecker states that Paul’s writing concerns, “...the tragic plight of people who attempt to live their lives apart from God and by means of their own resources and abilities...the personal pronoun ‘I’ in v.7-13 refers to himself while the personal pronoun ‘I’ in v.14-25 refers to all of humanity in a gnomic fashion.”¹³ Further support is found from Harrison when he writes:

This personal reference (in vv.7-13) then broadens into a more general picture of the soul-struggle of a person who tries to serve God by obeying the law but finds himself checkmated by the operation of sin within himself...the experience pictured here is not wholly autobiographical but is deliberately presented in such a way as to demonstrate what would indeed be the situation if one who is faced with the demands of the law and the power of sin in his life were to attempt to solve his problem independently of the power of Christ and the enablement of the Spirit.¹⁴

¹⁰ Wallace, *Grammar*, 532.

¹¹ Charles Irons, *A Syntax Guide for Readers of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 349.

¹² Franz J. Leenhardt, trans. by Harold Knight, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961), 184.

¹³ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 659.

¹⁴ Frank E. Gæbelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Romans through Galatians, volume 10* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 78-84.

Beyond these arguments, there is further evidence from the Jewish Talmud, highlighted by Kümmel, that this usage of ἐγώ primarily functioned as a rhetorical and literary *stilform*.¹⁵ Thus, though this passage uses the first person, it may still be seen as predominantly gnomic.

While this view correctly interprets a gnomic device at play within Paul's rhetoric in v.14-25, three problems arise. First, the universal expansion of the gnomic ἐγώ seems to be without limitation based upon an exegetically unproven basis. Goodrich, who promotes a similar gnomic-only idea (view #2 above), restricts this gnomic ἐγώ to the people of Israel on the basis of the νόμος-focused Paul:

To be sure, many continue to interpret ἐγώ as representative of all humanity, arguing that ἐγώ either is to be identified as Adam/Eve, or is a conflation of Adam, Israel, and Paul, and thus stands for all people. However, to bring the allusion to the garden to the forefront of the narrative, and thus to attach the experience of ἐγώ to all of Adamic humanity, is not only to ignore the specific referent of νόμος in this passage, but also to minimize the particularity of the period from Moses to Christ.¹⁶

Second, this view suffers exegetically. Interpreting "I" figuratively, rather than literally, has often been the ruin of many exegetical synopses. While it is granted that such a first person rhetorical device of this gnomic nature *can* be conceived in Scripture (c.f. 1 Cor. 13.1-3, Romans 3.7), evidence should be brought forth that shows why this passage can *only* function gnomically and not autobiographically. There must be substantial evidence from the broader corpus of Pauline writing or from the context of Romans 7 itself in order to substantiate this strange limited gnomic occurrence in the first person singular. Additionally, there remains a problem for the

¹⁵ Longenecker, Romans, 653.

¹⁶ John K. Goodrich, "Sold under Sin: Echoes of Exile in Romans 7.14-25," *Cambridge Vol.59*, Iss.4 (October 2013): 490.

exegete who would propose *only* a gnomic usage of ἐγώ in v.14-25 following an autobiographical usage in v.7-13. How does this disjunction arise apart from a preconceived theological notion? It seems more likely that Paul would be using ἐγώ in the same autobiographical sense while differentiating his experiences in each of these sections by the *means of tense* rather than a *change in function*. So, rather than taking an *either/or* approach to the function of this passage, there is freedom to take a *both/and* approach. As Theissen argues, “anyone who denies to Paul the ἐγώ in Romans 7 has to bear the burden of proof for this claim.”¹⁷

Finally, this view suffers theologically. Inclusion of the unregenerate within this passage cannot be coordinated with the positive sentiments towards the law of God of the man in reference. Rom. 1.32 says the unregenerate is able to be ἐπιγινόντες the law of God, but it does not say that he has “τὸ θέλειν ἀγαθὸν παράκειται μοι.” Neither can the unregenerate say, “συνήδομαι τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.” Further, if we conclude Paul is representing an unregenerate man and observe his concluding “ἄρα οὖν” in verse 25b, then it would be possible for such a man to rejoice in Christ in 25a. But we know that the unregenerate does not and cannot rejoice in Christ. As Timmins notes, this problem is “felt especially acutely by those interpreters who locate ἐγώ at a time prior to the receiving of deliverance through Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ Rather than serving as an independent thought, verse 25b is more naturally seen as a summary of a completed argument. The theological foundation of depravity seems to restrict us from adhering to the idea that the Apostle Paul could be speaking as a figurative unregenerate. Rom. 3.10-12 shows the inability in an unregenerate state to seek after God, so Rom. 7.14-25 would have to reverse course in order to say that the unregenerate can (and does!) desire good and rejoice in the

¹⁷ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 201.

¹⁸ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 157.

law of God. Therefore, the burden of proof falls on the advocates of this view to either show that Paul (i) uses “ἅπα οὖν” in an independent sense which does not refer to the universal man previously mentioned or (ii) describes the unregenerate as able to desire good and rejoice in the law of God.

(4) *Gnomic and autobiographical Christian life view* - This view of Augustinian heritage, which is the one held in most of the Western and Reformed tradition, encapsulates a *both/and* approach. Initially, Augustine exemplified the difficulty in interpreting this passage when he wrote how his mind had changed from interpreting this passage in a non-autobiographical way:

I did not see how the Apostle could say: ‘But I am carnal,’ since he was spiritual, and how he was held captive under the law of sin in his members. I thought this could be affirmed only of those so completely under the power of concupiscence that they must always do its bidding. It would be unreasonable to think this of the Apostle, since an innumerable multitude of saints lust with the spirit against the flesh. Later on, I yielded to better and more enlightened minds, or, rather, to truth itself, and I heard in the words of the Apostle the groaning of the saints in their battle against carnal concupiscence.

Although the saints are spiritually minded, they are still carnal in the corruptible body which is a load upon the soul... They are still prisoners under the law of sin, inasmuch as they are subject to stimulations by desires to which they do not consent. Thus I came to understand this matter as did Hilary, Gregory, Ambrose, and other holy and renowned teachers of the Church, who saw that the Apostle, by his own words, fought strenuously

the same battle against carnal concupiscences he did not wish to have, yet in fact did have.¹⁹

Following in his footsteps Calvin says:

He then sets before us an example in a regenerate man, in whom the remnants of the flesh are wholly contrary to the law of the Lord, while the spirit would gladly obey it... it is sufficiently clear from the context, and it has been in fact already shown, that under the term flesh is included whatever men bring from the womb; and flesh is what men are called, as they are born, and as long as they retain their natural character; for as they are corrupt, so they neither taste nor desire anything but what is gross and earthly. Spirit, on the contrary is renewed nature, which God forms anew after his own image. And this mode of speaking is adopted on this account – because the newness which is wrought in us is the gift of the Spirit.²⁰

Hodge continues this hermeneutical heritage by saying, “Others again say that Paul is here speaking as a Christian; he is giving his own religious experience of the operation of the law, as the experience is common to all true believers... the experience here exhibited is the experience of every renewed man.”²¹ Murray agrees that v.14-25 is “the delineation of Paul’s experience in the state of grace.”²²

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, “Against Julian” in *The Fathers of the Church A New Translation*, vol. 35. trans. Matthew A. Schumacher, C.S.C. (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1957), 381-382.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owens (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 259-260.

²¹ Hodge, *Romans*, 222.

²² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), 259.

While these Augustinian views correctly interpret this passage as *both* autobiographical *and* gnomic, they fail to fill out a fuller Biblical theology which presents itself within the context of Romans. Taking advantage of this opportunity was William N. Timmins. This similar but more enriched scholarly presentation argues that while Romans 7.14-25 does speak to the regenerate Christian, Paul has his mind set on the fuller experience of the paradigmatic Adam and Israel. Along with his agreement with the aforementioned assessment of Philonenko, Timmins makes a strong connection between pre-Messianic Israel with the contemporary Christian, saying, “We witness a Christ-believer confessing to a fleshly condition that has not yet caught up with the life that he has been given in Christ.”²³ Therefore, not only does this passage represent the regenerate man, but it finds fuller meaning in considering Edenic Adam’s encounter with the law and the Jewish peoples’ experience of the exile.

Timmins gives strong exegetical and structural evidence for this perspective which views Paul’s encounter with the law in v.7-13 as a recapitulation of the primeval sin of Adam in the garden.²⁴ He notes that the usage of *ἐγώ* is “a movement from an inclusive ‘we’ to a representative, paradigmatic ‘I,’ [in which the ‘I’] stands out from the ‘we’ whom he represents, but does not stand *apart*, since his experience is expressed as *typical* of that of all believers.”²⁵ Similar thoughts are made by Schreiner when he contends that this passage “is autobiographical, denoting the experience of the apostle Paul,” while also agreeing that the paradigmatic perspective above also contains truth “since Paul replicates the history of Adam and Israel.”²⁶ Seifrid also poignantly makes this case:

²³ Timmins, Will N. “Romans 7 and the Resurrection of Lament in Christ: The Wretched ‘I’ and His Biblical Doppelgänger.” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 61, no. 4 (2019): 386–408.

²⁴ Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 133.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 359.

The same overlap of "now" and "then" is reflected in Paul's description of life in the Spirit in Romans 8 also, so that one can dismiss this interpretation by an appeal to "salvation-historical" progress from Romans 7 to Romans 8. Even in Romans 8 Paul envisions sin as a continuing reality, inherent to life in the body of the fallen human being. The new realities have overcome, but have not eliminated the juridical and ontological conditions of the old order.

This final assessment of Romans 7.14-25 seems to be the most consistent and able to substantiate an orthodox interpretation of the Scriptures. Through the use of lexical and syntactical clues it is my goal to substantiate this fourth view and to show that this passage functions *both* gnominically *and* autobiographically in order to describe the experience of the regenerate man.

Lexical Clues

First Person Singular

The pattern of authorial voice within this epistle is striking to consider. In Romans 5-8, Paul shifts the pronominal voice many times. But the transition to the first person singular voice is particularly striking in the passage we are observing. The following shows the differing usages of voice within these chapters:²⁷

	3rd pl.	3rd sg.	2nd pl.	2 sg.	1st pl.	1 sg.
5.1-11	0	12	0	0	17	0
5.12-21	5	14	0	0	1	0

²⁷ Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 97.

6.1-14	0	21	10	0	16	0
6.15-7.6	0	12	23	0	9	3
7.7-25	0	20	0	1	3	52
8.1-17	4	14	13	1	7	0
8.18-39	0	34	0	1	26	2

It is quite obvious that there is a utterly unique usage of Paul within 7.7-25, using the first person singular voice 52 times; a voice which in other sections is seemingly absent. Like previously mentioned, the overwhelming evidence shows that Paul is at least speaking autobiographically when using the first person singular voice. The burden of proof lies upon those who would argue otherwise that he is *only* speaking gnomically in the first person singular. Those arguing for a uniquely gnomic interpretation do so by appealing to Romans 3.7 and 1 Cor. 13.1-3. The difference between these passages and Romans 7.14-25 is that the former exhibit a clear rhetorical effort to *disprove* the opponent (reductio ad absurdum) while the latter exhibits a clear rhetorical effort to *prove* the argument of Paul.

In Romans 3.7 we see the gnomic rhetoric function to *disprove* the opponent. At no point should the reader be led to think Paul actually thinks that “God is unrighteous,” but rather that he is appealing to a generic human way of thinking (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω) in order to *disprove* his opponents. This persuades the reader to interpret this as uniquely gnomic. On the other hand, rather than *disproving* the opponent through this gnomic device, Paul uses a gnomic device in Romans 7.14-25 to *prove* his own stance – namely that the law is good.

1 Cor. 13.1-3 provides another example of a reductio ad absurdum. Similar to the previous example, Paul uses this device to establish a claim by showing that the opposite

scenario would lead to absurdity or contradiction. Paul is *disproving* the valuation of the spiritual gifts above love. Because of this primary intent to *disprove* the opponent, this shows that Paul is using the first person singular *only* in the gnomic sense. On the other hand, the primary intent of Paul in Romans 7.14-25 is to *prove* his own stance – namely that the law is good.

While the Apostle Paul *could* be speaking only in a gnomic sense, this analysis of 1 Corinthians 13.1-3 and Romans 3.7 shows that he was using ἐγώ to disprove the absurdity of contrary positions. Analysis of Romans 7.14-25 cannot sustain that the Apostle Paul is only speaking gnomically because the force of the argument is used to prove his own proposition rather than disprove the proposition of the other. Thus, Romans 7.14-25 ought to be considered as *both* gnomic *and* autobiographical until further evidence proves otherwise.

Θέλω

The nominal or verbal form of θέλω intrudes significantly upon this text. Derivatives of θέλω are used nineteen times throughout this epistle. 37% of those usages appear in this passage alone. After dividing these usages on the basis of their genitive counterparts – i.e. the will of God versus the will of man – and after omitting common pleasantries at the beginning and the end of the letter, we find that 70% of the usages of θέλω describing the will of man throughout the entire letter are used in these twelve verses. Rom. 7.15 is the first usage of θέλω since it was used in Rom. 2.18.

It seems reasonable and contextually probable that the Apostle Paul sought to show that there was a change from the unregenerate's mere *knowledge of* God's will (2.18) to an alignment of the regenerate's *θέλημα* with God's will (7.14-25). And subsequent to this transition passage in chapter 7, the Apostle sought to show the expectation upon such a renewed mind which was in

line with the will of God (12.2). In terms of the structure, Rom. 7.1-6 serves as a sort of summary of the general truths promoted throughout the first six chapters, while Rom. 7.7-25 serves as a defense of the law and its purpose, with vv.7-13 describing the unregenerate's mere *knowledge* of the law evidenced by death, and vv.14-25 describing the alignment of the regenerate's *θέλημα* with God's will evidenced by joyful subjection to the law.

Σάρκινος

Further a lexical clue can be taken from Paul's usage of σάρκινος in verse 14. It would be prudent to distinguish this usage from σαρκικός in places like 1 Corinthians 3.3. Maintaining the Koine nuances of adjectival endings, -ικος refers to a 'belonging to' while -ινος refers to the material something is 'made of.' Thus, Paul's usage of σάρκινος in verse 14 refers to a temporary anthropological condition rather than an eschatological affiliation.²⁸ He was not referring to himself as unregenerate from an eschatological standpoint, but he sought to show his temporary condition of continuing with the presence of sin.

The first person singular pronouns, uses of θέλω, and use of σάρκινος provide a valid basis for concluding that this passage functions *both* gnomically *and* autobiographically in order to describe the experience of the regenerate man.

Syntactical Clues

Πεπραμένος

Paul transitions away from a gnomic-only idea in the first half of Romans 7.14 by using a *personal* subject (ἐγώ) in the latter half. The autobiographical sense of ἐγώ is used to substantiate

²⁸ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 141-143.

the gnomic idea presented in the beginning of v.14. Οἶδαμεν functions as an intensive perfect in order to set up a contrast with the extensive perfect πεπραμένος in the latter half of the verse. The extensive function of πεπραμένος is key to understanding this passage as both autobiographical and gnomic. While some translations argue for an intensive use of πεπραμενος, “[am] sold”, others have translated πεπραμένος as an example of the extensive perfect, “having been sold”, which emphasizes the completed action.²⁹ This latter translation seems more appropriate with the contrast that the Apostle desires to make in the proceeding verses. Thus, πεπραμένος serves as the pivot from a perfect verbal aspect in vv.7-13 to an imperfect verbal aspect in vv.14-25. Timmins agrees with this extensive perfect use of πεπραμένος by saying it “has in view the event of being sold that gave rise to the condition of fleshliness.”³⁰ While Timmins sees this extensive usage as paradigmatic of Adam’s fall in Eden or Israel’s captivity in Babylon, he also sees it as describing Paul’s life before regeneration. If we were to interpret πεπραμένος as an extensive perfect, then we would have a key to unlocking the passage. Stressing the past action over the present condition, the Apostle Paul seems to say that he *had been* sold under sin, and thus may still retain the identity as a regenerate.

This extensive usage of a perfect passive participle by Paul is not unique to this text alone. Consider the following examples from Romans where a perfect passive participle is appropriately interpreted as an extensive perfect. Romans 1.1 describes Paul as *having been* set apart for apostleship. Romans 1.29 describes those who suppress the truth as *having been* filled with all kinds of evil. Romans 4.18 describes how Abraham believed in what he *had been* told. Romans 9.22 describes how God endured with much patience those vessels of wrath who *have been* prepared for destruction. Romans 9.25 describes those who *had been* not loved as God’s

²⁹ The Berean Literal Bible along with the Legacy Standard Bible have translated this in the latter sense.

³⁰ Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 145.

beloved. Romans 13.1 describes the authorities as those who *have been* instituted by God. Romans 16.25 describes how the revelation of the mystery *had been* kept secret. All these examples give adequate proof for also interpreting πεπραμένος as *having been* sold. This transition between an intensive (οἶδαμεν) and extensive (πεπραμένος) perfect in v.14 provides the contrast needed for interpreting the rest of the passage. From vv.15-25 the Apostle Paul uses imperfect verbal aspects to describe his present experiences. These “present verbs” describe the continual battle between the flesh which still clings closely and the spirit which has been renewed to desire good.

Under versus Within

Notice also the preposition change from being sold “under” sin to having sin live “within” him in the subsequent verses. This would seem to substantiate that πεπραμένος is acting extensively because sin has lost the upper hand in compelling the Apostle Paul “under” it, even though it still has the persistence to recede to the corners of his members.³¹ Further he does not refer to himself as totally depraved when he makes a clarification of where the sin resides in v.18, “For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my flesh...” Hodge concurs when he comments, “Paul is here explaining how it is that there is such a contradiction between his better principles and his conduct, as just described. The reason is, that in himself he *was* entirely depraved... As Paul is here speaking of himself, he limits the declaration that there *was* no good in him. In its full sense, as a renewed man, this could not be true; he therefore adds, ‘in my flesh.’”³² Calvin asks, “Why was the modification made, except that some part was exempt from

³¹ It should be noted that μέλος should be seen differently than ἔσω ἄνθρωπον. For more reading on this subject see Guinther, Peter A. “Μέλος, A Significant Anthropological Term in Understanding Romans 7:14-8:8.” PhD diss., Regent University, 2019. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Also consider John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. trans. John Owens (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 271.

³² Hodge, *Romans*, 233.

depravity, and therefore not flesh?”³³ So, in his periphrastic construction “that is in my flesh,” Paul explicitly shows that sin was not dominating his whole being but rather his flesh. Thus, he drew a line between the common unregenerate and the new man fighting against his flesh.

These syntactical clues provide a valid basis for concluding that this passage functions *both* gnomically *and* autobiographically in order to describe the experience of the regenerate man.

Theological Implications

“The fundamental distinction... is the difference between the ἐγώ’s ontological identity as a person in Christ and his anthropological condition as someone who remains ‘fleshly’ for as long as he inhabits the Adamic body of death.”³⁴ This distinction must be maintained if we are to hold to an inaugurated eschatology rather than an under-realized eschatology. This under-realized eschatology is at risk of promoting an unhealthy perspective on Christian growth and maturity. Rather than fostering Christian growth as Paul often does, this under-realized eschatology seemingly demands a *total* anthropological change from the moment of regeneration. Contrasting this is a proper inaugurated eschatology which allows for continual growth and maturation which results in the process of regeneration. Calvin qualified this proper timetable of regeneration by saying, “this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples, renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will only end at death.” In short, rather than a definition of regeneration which views the

³³ Calvin, *Romans*, 267.

³⁴ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 205.

regenerate as a totally new being, an inaugurated eschatology contends that regeneration is a process which renews the being. Rather than seeing faith as a one time demand for the regenerate, it is proper to distinguish between the forensic justifying power of faith and the ontological sanctifying power of faith. The inaugurated eschatology hermeneutic allows for this distinction within a passage like Romans 7. In other words, faith positionally justifies the man and continually is renewing the anthropological impotence of the man throughout his life. As Timmins rightly summarized, “A confession of anthropological impotency is no enemy to the christological confession which lies at the heart of Paul’s conception of the Christian life.”³⁵

One concern about interpreting this passage as descriptive of the regenerate man is that it facilitates a licentious theology. But this need not be the case, and contextually is certainly not the case (Rom. 6.1). “If, indeed, it were true, as has been asserted, that the person here described “succumbs to sin in every instance of contest,” the description would be inapplicable [to the Christian]... There is, however, nothing even approaching the implication of such a sentiment in the whole passage. Paul merely asserts that the believer is, and ever remains in this life, imperfectly sanctified.”³⁶ The very opposite of licentiousness is found when the Apostle describes himself as “doing the very thing he hates.” Licentiousness is loving those things which are contrary to the law of God, but Paul declares that he hates those things contrary to the law. And it is this hatred that proves his renewed nature. Therefore, within the interpretation defended there is no hint that the Apostle Paul was using this as a means to sin more freely.

Speaking to the seemingly incompatible ἀκρασία of the passage Van Den Beld says, “We can now interpret the ego's 'split personality' in terms of the incompatible wants which he fosters within himself...Because he did not carry out the want with which he identified himself, it is

³⁵ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 210.

³⁶ Hodge, *Romans*, 241.

understandable that he feels alienated from his own actions — It is an anthropological division, but one that has roots in Adam’s transgression, not in humanity’s creation.”³⁷

The apostle desired to empty the holiest among us to the lowest of lows in order that he might direct our gaze towards the heights of God’s grace shown in Christ Jesus. Common to Pauline theology seen in many epistles, this great man of God always found a way to see the sinfulness within himself in order to elevate the grace of God (cf. 1 Cor. 15.9; Eph. 3.8; 1 Tim. 1.15). This passage should be viewed no differently. The Christians of Rome upon reading this would have been most encouraged to see that even the Apostle Paul, the chosen messenger to the nations, struggled with sin. As Hodge concluded, “The emotions and affections do not obey a determination of the will (cf. 7.16,18,19,21). A change of purpose, therefore, is not a change of heart.”³⁸ This passage has been used countless to encourage the faint-hearted believer to continue getting up from his failure - to continue putting his faith in the finished work of Christ - to continue coming to the throne of grace. In other words this passage contends that, “The freedom from slavery which believers have been gifted in Christ is not yet possessed as an anthropological phenomenon.”³⁹

Conclusion

After looking at many reasonable hypotheses on this passage and having observed the lexical and syntactical clues, it is most probable that the Apostle Paul sought to broadly *represent* the sanctification process common to all those vitally regenerated *by* recounting his personal

³⁷ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁹ Timmins, *Christian Identity*, 147.

experience of sanctification. In other words, this passage functions *both* gnomically *and* autobiographically in order to describe the experience of the regenerate man.

While this passage will be endlessly debated and disagreed upon within evangelical circles, this is not at all a bad thing. Such conversations I expect, if dealt with humbly, will refine our uncontested agreements with each other on some very important truths conveyed by the Apostle: (1) Sin is an unkind master which kills. (2) The law is holy. (3) Humanity is hopelessly lost in their sin without the intervening work of the Holy Spirit. (4) All glory and thanks should be given to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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