

THE INTERPETATION OF ROMANS CHAPTER 7 AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS

by Karl Kemp

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This paper, which was published in July, 1999, deals extensively with the interpretation of Romans chapter 7 by the early (before AD 500) Christian writers, and it includes many excerpts from these writers. I found some of these ancient writings to be quite edifying, along with being important and interesting. This paper doesn't include a verse-by-verse discussion of Romans chapter 7, but it supplements the verse-by-verse discussions of Romans chapter 7 that are included in my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ" (pages 104-116) and in the "Twenty-Eight Articles on Holiness and Victory Over Sin" (see article numbers 12-14). I strongly suggest you read one or both of those verse-by-verse discussions before reading this paper, unless you are well acquainted with Romans chapter 7 and its interpretation.

First I'll include the Table of Contents from the original paper. Some of the lengthy quotations that were included in the original paper are substantially abbreviated in this internet version. I had received permission to quote extensively for the original paper, but not for this internet version. You could request a copy of the original paper.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a modified, expanded version of the paper originally put together in 1996. It builds on, and it supplements, the verse-by-verse discussion of Romans chapter 7 on pages 104-116 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of rightly understanding Romans chapter 7.

Many evangelical Christians in our day (about half) understand Romans chapter 7 to teach that Christians cannot walk in victory over sin (we cannot stop sinning) during this present age. This widespread viewpoint has done great damage to the Body of Christ, obviously undercutting faith for victory over sin to one degree or another. But victory over sin can only come by grace through faith, through Christ's atoning death and resurrection, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the outset of this paper, I want to make it clear that I know that there are many sincere, godly Christians who (from my point of view) misinterpret Romans chapter 7. It's not hard for some to misinterpret this passage when this has been the dominant view in certain segments of the Body of Christ for hundreds of years. Another factor that has lent itself to a misinterpretation of this passage is the low level of righteousness and holiness that has often existed in much of the church. I don't want to be perceived as attacking, or insulting, or showing disrespect for other Christians. I want to do everything I can to promote true unity in the Body of Christ (but unity in the truth, especially the truth of the Christian basics; and unity in righteousness and holiness, not unity in sin), and I want this paper to be a blessing to the Body of Christ.

Some Christians, because they have so many other things right, and because they really are trying to make God their top priority, haven't been affected too much by their wrong interpretation of Rom. 7:14-25. Nevertheless, it stands true that the misinterpretation of Rom. 7:14-25 has done tremendous damage to the cause of righteousness and holiness in the Body of Christ. I believe it's time for many Christians to prayerfully reconsider their interpretation of Romans chapter 7. It's my prayer that this paper will help many toward that end. My primary goal for this paper is that it will help many Christians come to a fuller understanding of this important chapter of the very important epistle of Paul to the Romans.

The most common view of evangelical Christians in our day regarding righteousness and holiness is that the most we can hope for is to be progressively sanctified, thereby decreasing the amount of sin as time goes by, but never gaining the victory over sin as long as we live. A major source for this inadequate viewpoint, which doesn't permit Christians to have faith for victory over sin, is the misinterpretation of Rom. 7:14-25. It's true that Christians must continue to grow throughout their lives in Christ, but the New Testament typically speaks of Christians being sanctified, abiding in a state of holiness, not of holiness being an elusive goal that is never reached in this life. I'm not talking about some way-out absolute perfection; I'm talking about Christians, including Christians young in the faith, walking according to God's Word and by His Spirit in a reasonable way, and living for God as His born-again children in faithfulness, by His sufficient grace through faith.

Tremendous damage to the cause of righteousness and holiness in the Body of Christ has also come through the widespread misinterpretation of 1 John 1:8. Based on my studies, some eighty to ninety percent of Christians (including evangelicals) understand 1 John 1:8 to teach that Christians cannot stop sinning in this life. More misinterpret 1 John 1:8 than Rom. 7:14-25 (about fifty percent), but the misinterpretation of Rom. 7:14-25 is quite a bit more serious, since it spells out the "Christian's" supposed bondage to sin in much more powerful terms. Galatians 5:17 is another verse that has often been misinterpreted, but it hasn't caused as much damage as the misinterpretations of Rom. 7:14-25 and 1 John 1:8. (These

verses are all discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, starting on page 194.)

Many Christians who don't understand Rom. 7:14-25 to teach that Christians cannot quit sinning have, nevertheless, been significantly influenced by the wrong interpretation of these verses, since it has been such a powerful force in lowering the Christian standard from any idea even close to walking in the righteousness and holiness of God. One manifestation of this fact is that whenever any Christian (like John Wesley or Charles Finney, for example) came on the scene teaching victory over sin in Christ, they were attacked with Rom. 7:14-25 and 1 John 1:8. A major, widespread capitulation to sin (to one degree or another) has taken place. The most widespread viewpoint, even among evangelicals, is that it's totally unrealistic, and unbiblical, to think of Christians not sinning. Based on what I have read of the writings of the ancient Christian church, we have lowered the standard for righteous living substantially below their standard. The quotations included in this paper from ancient writers should suffice to demonstrate that point. The standard we must follow, of course, is the Biblical standard; but we must understand what God's Word actually says.

One of the major manifestations of the fact that something is wrong with our present standard of righteousness and holiness is that we so seldom hear the words repent and repentance in the Body of Christ in our day. I'm speaking of repentance at the time of conversion, and of repentance for Christians. Coupled with this is the major problem of the out-of-balance teaching about God: We hear so much about His love, but this isn't balanced out with what the Bible says about His wrath. It's no wonder there's so little fear of God in so many Christians in our day, but the Bible, very much including the New Testament, makes it clear that it's necessary for us to have a proper fear of God. We should be afraid to sin against Him. On the fear of God, see under Phil. 2:12-16 in my paper titled, "The Christian, the Law, and Legalism."

I don't believe the Bible backs up the idea that we Christians can forever continue to abide in God's love if we consent to live in sin. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love..." (John 15:10). "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21). "Keep yourselves in the love of God [by remaining in the truth of God and the righteousness of God, by cooperating with His grace/Spirit through faith]..." (Jude 1:21). Revelation chapters 2 and 3, by themselves (and there is much other Scripture), suffice to show that there are conditions for remaining in the love of God. I discussed this topic in some detail in my paper on Ephesians chapter 1.

I'm not suggesting that God just stops loving us, His born-again children, if we fall into sin, but to the extent we're living in sin, we're not fully abiding in God's love. His love calls us to repentance (e.g., Rev. 3:19), but the more we're living

in sin, and the longer we continue in unrepentance, the more serious it becomes. Revelation 3:15-18 show, for example, what Jesus said would happen to the Christians at Laodicea if they didn't repent. Verses like these demonstrate that it's very dangerous for Christians to persist in sin under the mistaken, out-of-balance (Biblical balance) idea that God will forever continue to love us just the same no matter what we believe or what we do. I don't believe it's reasonable to say that those who will be excluded from God's kingdom (and His presence) will abide in His love. I'm saying these things to encourage repentance, not despair. We must do the things God requires of us (by his grace); no one can do them for us. I'm not siding in with the devil, who frequently tells Christians that God won't forgive them, that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Quite the contrary, I'm encouraging Christians to repent, where repentance is required (there is no reasonable alternative), and I'm confident that God will forgive and restore all Christians who repent.

Yes, God loved the prodigal son and rejoiced over his repentance (Luke 15:11-31; cf. Luke 15:7, 10), but what if he didn't repent? Yes, God loved the Christians at Laodicea; He wanted them to repent and called them to repentance, but what if they didn't repent? There's a powerful message here for the Christians of our day that God is calling to repent and to make Him, His Word, His will, His righteousness, and His holiness top priority. I'll list several other verses relevant to this topic: Psalms 5:5, 6; 7:11, 12; 11:4-7; Ezek. 18:30-32; Luke 13:1-5; 2 Cor. 7:9, 10; and 2 Pet. 3:9 (which is dealing, at least in part, with the need for Christians to repent).

We don't need more condemnation in the Body of Christ, and thank God for forgiveness, but we do need more transformation to the righteousness and holiness of God. We must be open and honest before God to recognize and acknowledge our sin; we must be quick to repent and ask for forgiveness; and we must make victory over sin (by God's grace) a top priority item - God knows our hearts. Anything that God considers to be sin in our life is a serious matter; but, on the other hand, it doesn't work for good when we call things sin that God doesn't consider to be sin (and this happens quite a bit). (See the section titled, "What is Sin," starting on page 214 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, for some examples.

We desperately need to make righteousness and holiness a top priority item, but we must understand that we receive and walk in God's righteousness and holiness by grace through faith (a faith based on God and His Word, His Word rightly divided), otherwise we'll just be striving in the flesh. We need all the help God has made available to us to defeat the world, the flesh, and the devil with his demons (by His sufficient grace), including the help that comes through other Christians. We don't need excuses for sin derived from a misinterpretation of God's Word; that certainly won't work for good. It may make a person feel a little better about themselves for a while, but the heart/conscience of a true Christian will never be satisfied while sin continues in us, or in the church.

As a Christian young in the faith, I was often confronted with Romans chapter 7 by Christians sincerely trying to help me. I was frequently informed that I must be misunderstanding Romans chapters 6 and 8 (and other passages of Scripture) if I thought that the apostle Paul was saying that Christians are called to walk with the victory over all sin. They told me that Romans chapter 7 proves that it can't be so. I couldn't begin to count all the times I have been told that Romans chapter 7 proves that Christians cannot stop sinning throughout the last forty-five years. Many Christians believe it is deception and even heresy for Christians to believe they could ever stop sinning during this age. They are saying this, at least the primary reason sincere, Bible-believing Christians are saying this, because they believe it goes against the Bible (Rom. 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8; and Gal. 5:17, for example).

We often hear that all Christians sin daily, in thought, in word, and in deed. But is this what the Bible really teaches? I don't think so. Back then (starting in 1964) I got motivated to (prayerfully) study the entire topic of righteousness and holiness, very much including the interpretation of Romans chapter 7; I have been studying this topic more than any other ever since. What I've found is good news! What I'm sharing in this paper is good news, very good news!

The key issue is whether the apostle Paul was speaking as a non-Christian or a Christian in Rom. 7:14-25. Was he speaking as a Christian when he said, for example, "For the good I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish" (Rom. 7:19). The dominant viewpoint of the early Christian writers up until the time the very influential Augustine changed his viewpoint (about AD 410), was that Paul was *not* speaking as a Christian in this passage; he was speaking of/for unregenerate mankind (those not born again through the Lord Jesus Christ). This was Augustine's earlier viewpoint, but in his later, anti-Pelagian years, he came to favor the viewpoint that Paul was speaking as a Christian in Rom. 7:14-25. Augustine had intense conflict with Pelagius in his later years.

It is very significant, however, that Augustine made a very substantial qualification to this interpretation. He said that if this passage deals with Christians, it speaks only of Christians having wrong thoughts and desires, which the Christians resist and fight against by the grace of God in Christ, not of Christians actually sinning. Even though the later viewpoint of Augustine was clearly wrong - Paul wasn't speaking as a Christian in this passage, and this qualification doesn't begin to fit what Paul said in this passage - if the Christians who believe that Rom. 7:14-25 deals with Christians included this qualification, their interpretation would not hinder Christians from walking with the victory over sin.

Augustine mentioned that he was influenced by other Christian writers in coming to his new viewpoint. The three Christian writers that I am aware of who

were early enough to have influenced Augustine included the very substantial qualification that Augustine included. Methodius (about AD 260-311) probably was one of the writers who influenced Augustine; he was the earliest Christian writer that I'm aware of who understood Rom. 7:14-25 to deal with Christians, and he clearly included the qualification. Not only did he include the qualification, but the excerpts from him in this paper demonstrate that Methodius was strong on victory over sin for Christians. The only two other Christian writers who understood Rom. 7:14-25 to deal with Christians, who were early enough to have influence Augustine that I'm aware of, were Epiphanius (about AD 315-403) and Gregory of Nazianzus (about AD 329-390). They both included the qualification. Even though those brethren from long ago qualified their interpretation that Rom. 7:14-25 was dealing with Christians, they (and especially Augustine, because of his great influence) opened a door that should not have been opened, and it was bound to happen that some would find it rather easy to drop the qualification, or greatly modify it. Many doors must be kept shut; you open them a little and eventually end up being shocked and overwhelmed with what comes into your tent/house/life.

There may be some Christians in our day who understand Rom. 7:14-25 to refer to Christians who include the important qualification that Augustine included, but I'm not aware of any. I'll repeat the qualification. These early Christian writers said that these verses speak of Christians having wrong thoughts and desires which they resist and fight against by the grace of God in Christ, not of Christians actually sinning.

I should mention that some Christians in our day believe it is sin for Christians to have wrong thoughts and desires. It's quite clear that these things are undesirable; they are part of the old man/fallen man/the flesh that hasn't been annihilated yet, and won't be annihilated until Jesus returns and we are glorified. But I believe the New Testament makes it clear that wrong thoughts and desires, when resisted and fought against by Christians in the power of the Holy Spirit, are not sin. They are part of the Christian's warfare, which we are supposed to win by God's sufficient grace. We win by not sinning. See Rom. 6:11-14; 8:4, 12-14; and Gal. 5:16, 17, for example. (These verses speak of Christians not sinning as they, by the Holy Spirit, deny the flesh/the old man the opportunity to manifest itself in sin. The wrong desires and thoughts of the flesh/old man may be there on occasion; that's the cause for the warfare spoken of in Gal. 5:17; but that, in itself, doesn't constitute sin. These verses are all discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.)

Some Christians believe that the Lord Jesus Christ taught that if a Christian has a lustful thought, he has already committed a serious sin, even the sin of adultery. I believe that is a serious misunderstanding of what the Lord said. Let's take a quick look at what the Lord said in Matt. 5:27, 28. I'll read from the "New King James Version," "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has

already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus was speaking of a man who looks at a woman to lust for her, for the purpose of lusting for her. That is very different than a Christian having a lustful thought and turning his head rather than look at a woman with lust, very different indeed. I should also mention that Jesus spoke the words of Matt. 5:27, 28 in a context where He was making the important point that He had not come to lower the standard of righteousness that God had established under the old covenant, but rather to raise the standard through His saving work.

Another important point we should discuss further is that it isn't a reasonable interpretation of Paul's words in Rom. 7:14-25 to say that he is speaking of a person only having wrong thoughts and desires. In Rom. 7:14b Paul says, "But I am of flesh [to be of/in the flesh is to be in spiritual death, without the Spirit], sold [better yet, "having been sold," referring back to the rebellion and fall of Adam (Rom. 5:12-21)] into [the abiding state of] bondage to sin." These words, and the following words, speak of a state of bondage to sin, a state far more serious than a person having an occasional wrong thought or desire.

In the verses that follow (Rom. 7:15-25), Paul powerfully illustrates the fact that fallen man truly is in a state of slavery to sin by using for exhibit A the predicament of a very sincere Jew, one who is totally convinced that the Mosaic Law is from God and true and that it must be obeyed from the heart (he may have even memorized the Law and frequently meditated on it), but, nevertheless, his life frequently demonstrates that he truly is a slave of sin. Paul's primary point in these verses is to show that all mankind is so fallen that the Mosaic Law (even though it's from God and is good) isn't able to save fallen man from sin and spiritual death (it wasn't given by God for that purpose) - all mankind, therefore, needs new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:14 is a verse of key importance to understand Romans chapter 7; it says, "For sin shall not be master over you [These words were spoken to Christians, those who had been introduced to the victory over sin through salvation in Christ Jesus], for you are not under law [speaking of the Mosaic Law], but under grace [the saving grace of God in Christ]." In Romans chapter 7 the apostle elaborates on the important point made in 6:14, that if we were still under the Law instead of being in Christ, sin still would have dominion over us.

There are some Christians in our day who understand Rom. 7:14-25 to speak of a Christian(s), but who don't believe Paul is speaking of the normal Christian life in these verses. One such view is that Paul was speaking of an immature Christian, who hadn't yet learned to walk after the Spirit. This view is far from what Paul was dealing with in context, but it is a great improvement over any viewpoint that understands Rom. 7:14-25 to teach that Christians continue in bondage to sin, that they cannot stop sinning as long as they live, that they must necessarily fulfill their daily quota of sin.

I'm not making an attempt in this paper to equally present the different interpretations of Romans chapter 7 that have been held by various Christians. I'm putting most of the emphasis on what I'm sure is the correct interpretation, that Paul was not speaking as a Christian in Rom. 7:14-25. Also, I'm putting much of the emphasis on the interpretation of this passage for the first few hundred years, up until the time Augustine changed his viewpoint (about AD 410).

After the Introduction, this paper consists mostly of excerpts from others, but I'll make many comments too; my comments are typically enclosed in brackets. (A look at the Contents will enable the reader to see where we're going.) In the original paper I quoted extensively from Douglas Moo's recent commentary on Romans, because I agree with him so much, and because he was so thorough. I also quote extensively from Arminius's dissertation on Romans chapter 7; I found this work to be very helpful. His dissertation is about two-hundred pages. Arminius lived from AD 1560 to 1609. The Arminians are named after him. I also quote extensively from John Chrysostom (AD 347-407). His ancient homilies (sermons) on Romans chapter 7 convince me that he understood this chapter very well. I also quote extensively from Augustine (under Arminius) and from Methodius.

I'm writing this Introduction last. May God's will be fully accomplished through this paper, and may His people be edified! A primary goal for this paper is to help bring about transformation in the Body of Christ, where it's needed; as I mentioned, we don't need more condemnation. Thank God for His mercy and grace toward us! But let's make it a top priority to do everything we can do to refrain from abusing His grace, for His full glory, and for our full good. His will be done! Amen!

I'll conclude this Introduction with the prayer the apostle Paul prayed for the newly-founded church at Thessalonica, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely [in the very near future]; and may your spirit and soul and body [having been sanctified entirely] be preserved [or, kept] complete [or, sound], without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen!

Douglas Moo (professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois; *Epistle to the Romans*, [Eerdmans, 1996]). (I could have quoted much of the same information from Moo's *Romans 1-8* of the *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* series [Moody Press, 1991].) I'll quote extensively from Moo because I agree with so much that he says (he has fifty-nine pages dealing with Romans chapter 7). I have respected and appreciated his writings for many years. (For the record, I had reached a conclusion on most of the details of the correct interpretation of Romans chapter 7 long before Douglas Moo, who was born in 1950, was writing Bible commentaries.) I'll make extensive comments in brackets throughout these excerpts, very often agreeing with Moo, but sometimes disagreeing. I'll only quote a small part of what I quoted from Moo in this internet version of my paper.

(page 423) "The History and Experience of Jews [not Christians] Under the Law (7:7-25). [This heading covers pages 423-467.] In 7:1-6 Paul teaches that people must be released from the bondage of the Mosaic law in order to be joined to Christ because life under the law brings forth only sin and death. ...

The law, Paul affirms, is 'God's law' (v. 22) [Rom. 7:22] and is 'good' (vv. 12, 17), 'holy' (v. 12), 'just' (v. 12), and 'spiritual' (v. 14). How, then, could the law come to have so deleterious an effect? How could the good law of God 'work wrath' (4:15), 'increase the trespass' (5:20), and 'arouse sinful passions' (7:5)? This Paul seeks to explain in 7:7-25, pointing to sin as the culprit that has used the law as a 'bridgehead' to produce more sin and death (7:7-12) and to the individual 'carnal' person, whose own weakness and internal division allows sin to gain the mastery, despite the 'goodness' of the law (7:13-25)."

(pages 424-427) "The autobiographical direction. ... [[All the interpreters I'm familiar with who take this viewpoint (the *viewpoint* that Paul was referring to himself as a very young man when he spoke [in Rom. 7:9a] of *being alive once*) go on to interpret Rom. 7:14-25 of Paul's pre-Christian state. One major problem with this view is that it isn't able to adequately explain the switch to the present tense verbs at 7:14. As far as I know, this view isn't found in the early Christian writings. I appreciate the fact that this view doesn't leave the very wrong understanding that the apostle Paul, as a Christian, testified that he still was a slave of sin. If he had testified to such a state of affairs, and especially since he was right in the middle of a doctrinal teaching of key importance (where he was instructing the Roman Christians, and all of us, what the new covenant and Christianity is all about), we would have to assume that none of us could hope to do better than the great apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's testimony in Christ, by the way, was quite different (cf., e.g., Acts 23:1; 24:15, 16; 1 Cor. 4:4; 11:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2; 6:1-10; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; and 2 Tim. 1:3).] ...

Moo also includes another viewpoint under the autobiographical direction, the viewpoint that Paul thought he was alive until just before he became a Christian.]]

The Adamic direction. ... [(I'm quoting part of what I said in a bracket on pages 8, 9 here.) I don't believe we should think of Adam in 7:7-11, but, as Rom. 5:12-21 demonstrate, the fall of Adam does explain how mankind, including those under the Mosaic Law, came to be "of flesh [having been] sold into bondage to sin" (Rom. 7:14).] ...

The Israel direction. ... [[... (I'm quoting part of what I said in a bracket on pages 9, 10 here.) These verses (Rom. 7:7-25) speak, for the most part, of those who were under the Mosaic Law (the people of Israel), but it seems that Paul intended his "I" (and "me") to have much application for all mankind, for all the descendants of fallen Adam. I believe it would be accurate to understand Rom. 7:7-25 under a heading like "Fallen man confronted with the Mosaic Law - It can't save us! - We desperately need a Savior! - He has come!" Gentiles can read this passage and

see themselves, that is, if they would have only the Mosaic Law to save them - no matter how devoted to the Law we are, it can't save us. All Christians, whether from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds, must understand that the Mosaic Law (or any other law) is not able to save men from sin and spiritual death. The Law, in fact, as Paul shows in Romans chapter 7, and other places, intensifies (rather than solves) the sin problem.

Chrysostom's discussion of Romans chapter 7 recognizes that Paul's "I" extends, in some ways, beyond the people of Israel (those under the Law). What he says under Rom. 7:9, for example (which I'll quote later in this paper; under Chrysostom), fits the idea that the "I" of 7:9a embraces all mankind (not just the people of Israel) before the Mosaic Law was given. Then under 7:13, discussing the words, "Was then that which is good [the Mosaic Law] made death to me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin," Chrysostom says, "That is, that it might be shown what a great evil sin is, namely, a listless will, an inclinableness to the worst side, the actual doing, and the perverted judgment. For this is the cause of all evils; but he amplifies it by pointing out the exceeding grace of Christ, and teaching them what an evil He freed the human race from [the evil of being carnal (fleshly) slaves of sin], which, by the medicines used to cure it [the Mosaic Law], had become worse, and was increased by the preventives. Wherefore he [Paul] goes on to say: 'That sin, by the commandment, might become exceeding sinful.'" Also, what Chrysostom says under 7:14 (quoted later; under Chrysostom) is very much slanted to show the state of all mankind (not just the people of Israel) since the fall. Almost everything Chrysostom says in that quotation is relevant to this point.]]"

Now I'll quote part of what Moo said from page 10 of my paper. We are still under pages 424-427 of Moo's book. After adding a fourth heading, "The existential direction," Moo is commenting on what he considers to be the correct way to interpret Romans chapter 7. "Paul is describing his own, and other Jews' experience with the law of Moses: how that law came to the Jewish people and brought to them not 'life' but 'death' (vv. 7-12); and how that law failed, because of the reign of the flesh, to deliver Jews from the power of sin (vv. 13-25).

Since the ground-breaking study of Kummel, it has been widely assumed that ego (or the first person singular verb) could be used as a rhetorical device, without any personal reference being intended at all. And Kummel is certainly right." (In a footnote Moo says, "See, e.g, Rom. 3:7: 'But if the truth of God through my...lie abounds to his glory, why am I...still being judged as a sinner?' ")

Moo goes on to argue that "it is impossible to remove autobiographical elements...from ego in Rom. 7:7-25." It seems to be more confusing than helpful to bring in the autobiographical direction here. For one thing, it's important to see that this passage incorporates Paul's later Christian understanding, and would not adequately express his pre-Christian (autobiographical) viewpoint. As we'll see, Moo agrees that the viewpoint expressed in Rom. 7:14-25 has been influenced by

Paul's later enlightenment that came through salvation in Christ. The more these verses incorporate Paul's Christian, enlightened viewpoint, the less they can serve to speak for Paul himself when he was still under the Law (autobiographically). Furthermore, the more this account in Rom. 7:14-25 is somewhat theoretical and stylized for rhetorical effect, the more it doesn't qualify as autobiographical. One last point, I've already mentioned that the switch to present tense verbs at 7:14 doesn't fit an autobiographical viewpoint, that is, not if we believe Paul the Christian apostle was describing his pre-Christian experience.

(pages 429, 430) "...the coming of the commandment' in v. 9 is most naturally taken as a reference to the giving of the law at Sinai. [Yes, and this is a very important (but not widely recognized) point. (I first came to this viewpoint in 1970 while prayerfully studying Romans chapter 7 to write a paper for a class in seminary. I picked the topic of Romans chapter 7 for the paper.) This was the viewpoint of Chrysostom, as I'll demonstrate later in this paper; under Chrysostom.]I prefer to understand 'I died' [Rom. 7:9] in a theological, but relative, sense: 'though "I" had sinned, and was condemned before the law came, the coming of the commandment gave sin greater power and destructiveness than ever before, making me fully and personally responsible for my sin. The coming of the law brought to me, then, not life but death ("I died").'"

(page 437; under Rom. 7:8) "Accordingly, 'apart from the law' [means], as in 5:13, 'before the Mosaic law existed.' In the years before Sinai, Paul asserts, sin was 'dead' to Israel. That sin was 'dead' does not mean that it did not exist but that it was not as 'active' or 'powerful' before the law as after." In a footnote, Moo says, "...for the conception, see Rom. 4:15; 5:13-14; and esp. 5:20 and 7:5."

(pages 443-446) "Most of the early church fathers thought that these verses [7:13-25] described an unregenerate person. [Moo has a footnote referring to two books that include surveys of the Fathers, both in German.] This was Augustine's early view, but, partly as a result of his battle with Pelagius over (among other things) the freedom of the will, he changed his opinion and decided that the person depicted in these verses was a Christian. This interpretation was adopted by almost all the Reformers. [In a footnote Moo mentions Luther and Calvin and that Kummel notes that only Bucer and Musculus dissented from this view among the early Reformers.] None gave it more theological significance than Luther, who saw in these verses the classic statement of his view of the believer as 'at the same time a justified person and a sinner'.... .. The interpretation of vv. 14-25 in terms of 'normal' Christian experience was typical of Lutheran and Reformed theology right into the twentieth century and is still widespread. ...

The most important reasons for thinking the experience depicted in vv. 14-25 is that of an unregenerate person are the following [In my opinion the first five reasons are all very significant.]:

1. The strong connection of ego with 'the flesh' (vv. 14, 18, and 25) suggests that Paul is elaborating on the unregenerate condition mentioned in 7:5: being 'in the

flesh.'

2. Ego throughout this passage struggles 'on his/her own' ...without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

3. Ego is 'under the power of sin' (v. 14b), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22).

4. As the unsuccessful struggle of vv. 15-20 shows, ego is a 'prisoner of the law of sin' (v.23). Yet Rom. 8:2 proclaims that believers have been set free from this same 'law of sin (and death).'

5. While Paul makes clear that believers will continue to struggle with sin (cf., e.g., 6:12, 13; 13:12-14; Gal. 5:17), what is depicted in 7:14-25 is not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin. This is a more negative view of the Christian life than can be accommodated within Paul's theology.

6. The ego in these verses struggles with the need to obey the Mosaic law; yet Paul has already proclaimed the release of the believer from the dictates of the law (6:14; 7:4-6). [I don't agree that Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6 say that believers have been released from the dictates of the law, except for the ceremonial law. As Rom. 2:26, 27; 8:4 demonstrate, Christians are enabled (and required) to keep the moral Law of God in their daily lives as they walk after the Spirit through faith. (See my paper, "The Christian, The Law, and Legalism.")]

... [(I'm quoting part of what I said on page 10 of my paper.) As I mentioned, I believe it's important to see that Rom. 7:14-25 incorporates a Christian perspective. It doesn't, therefore, adequately reflect the pre-Christian experience of Paul (cf., e.g., Phil. 3:4-6; Acts 23:1; 2 Tim. 1:3), or of the Jews in general. For one thing, as Moo points out in the next excerpt, and as I mentioned in my discussion of Roman chapter 7 in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, the apostle Paul wasn't aiming to give a balanced presentation of the Law, but to emphasize its weaknesses and our attendant need for new-covenant salvation in Christ.]

... [[(I'm quoting the contents of a bracket I had on page 14 of my paper. I'm responding to the charge that the "I" of Rom. 7:7-25 must refer to Paul himself and that the present tense verbs of 7:14-25 can only refer to Paul speaking of his present experience as a Christian.) I believe I have fully explained the shift to the present tense verbs in 7:14-25. ... After all, most of the early Christian interpreters for hundreds of years realized Paul's "I" wasn't autobiographical. Admittedly, when you first read Paul's "I," your first thought would be that he is speaking of himself, but before you read much further you have enough information to see that what he says doesn't fit that viewpoint. Paul was speaking for all mankind, especially that part of mankind that was under the Mosaic Law. Anyway, because this is so important, and with the advantage of hindsight, I wish Paul hadn't used the "I" the way he did.

It was somewhat unusual for Paul to use "I" the way he did here, but, as has been demonstrated already, it's not all that unusual. Language can be very flexible, as Paul demonstrates, for example, in 2 Cor. 12:1-10 (especially 12:2). Perhaps Paul's main motivation for this somewhat unusual construction in Rom. 7:7-25 was to minimize giving offense to the Jews, as much as was reasonably possible. Paul was discussing a delicate subject when pointing out the inadequacies of the Mosaic Law (and the old covenant) which clearly came from God. Paul's "I" is quite effective to help all mankind (especially Jews, but also Gentiles) see their need for salvation in Christ Jesus. He powerfully illustrates the inability of the Law to save fallen man, and also demonstrates why Christians must make sure they are Christ/faith/grace/Spirit oriented, not Law/works/merit/flesh oriented. Many Gentiles can see themselves to some extent in Paul's "I."]]

[[I'm quoting the contents of three brackets I had on pages 14, 15 of my paper. First, I'm responding to the charge that only born-again (regenerate) Christians could joyfully concur with God's Law [Rom. 7:22], seek to obey it [Rom. 7:15-20], etc.) [Numerous verses in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament (e.g., Psalms 19 and 119), confirm that many old-covenant believers did these things to a significant extent, even though they had not been regenerated/born-again through Christ Jesus (before the life-giving, sanctifying Spirit had been given, in accordance with God's promise(s), through the crucified, resurrected, glorified Christ; cf., e.g., Isa. 32:15-18; Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 1:12, 13; 3:3-6; 7:37-39; 14:15-17; 16:7; 20:22; Acts 1:3-8; 2:33; and Rom. 8:2-17). How many would want to argue that Daniel, for example, didn't do these things. Even in our day there are many Jews that have a zeal for the Mosaic Law.]

We must take note of the fact that when Paul spoke of joyfully concurring with God's law, seeking to obey it, and serving it in Romans chapter 7, he was only speaking of serving it with the "mind" (without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in us through new-covenant salvation). The dominant point in this passage was that Paul's "I" wasn't free to (always) act in line with God's Law. Paul's main purpose in 7:15-25 was to powerfully demonstrate what he had said in 7:14, that fallen man truly is a slave of sin. He is, therefore, not able to keep God's Law.]

[[Here I'm responding to the specific charge that Rom. 3:11 proves that the unregenerate do not seek God.) It's quite clear that Paul's quotation of Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3 in Rom. 3:10-12, and most of his other quotations contained in Rom. 3:13-18, didn't apply to all men that had ever lived. For one thing, Psalms 14:4-7; 53:4-6 demonstrate that God's faithful servants, His "people" (Psalm 14:4), the "righteous generation" (Psalm 14:5), were excluded; they were the ones being afflicted, but not forever, because salvation had been promised to them (e.g., Psalm 14:7).]

[[I'm responding to another specific charge used by those who argue for the idea that the "I" of Rom. 7:14:25 must be a regenerate person.) Most of the verses cited

(Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:17; Col. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 2:15 [1:15]) that speak of men having a depraved mind are spoken in a context dealing with Gentiles/pagans, who didn't have the benefit of being instructed/enlightened by the Word/Law of God or of the grace that was available to believers under the old covenant. The Bible is full of examples to demonstrate that many Jews did, at least on one level of their being, think highly of God's Law, and many of their thoughts were shaped by His Law, on which they meditated. It should be noted, as I mentioned, that when Paul spoke of "[serving] the law of God" in 7:25, he was only speaking of serving it with the mind (in other words, something inside of them knew that it was necessary to keep God's Law, and they wanted to do it), not that they actually fully served the law of God. Daniel, his three friends, and multiplied thousands of Jews did much more than what Paul claimed for his unregenerate "I" in Rom. 7:14-25. I'm sure, however, that all such persons will be quick to admit their need for salvation through Christ Jesus.]]]

(pages 447, 448) "Our conclusion [Moo says]...is that vv. 14-25 describe the situation of an unregenerate person. Specifically, I think Paul is looking back, from his Christian understanding, to the situation of himself, and other Jews like him, living under the law of Moses. Of course, Paul is not giving us a full picture of that situation; he is concentrating on the negatives because this is what he must do to prove how useless the law was to deliver Jews [or Gentiles] from their bondage to sin. We might say, then, that Rom. 7:14-25 describes from a personal viewpoint the stage in salvation history that Paul delineates in Gal. 3:19-4:3."

(page 451) "Paul's characterization of the situation of Jews under the law in this paragraph [Rom. 7:14-25] describes, in personal terms, the state that resulted from the event he has narrated in vv. 7-13. This goes some way toward explaining the shift from past tense to present tense verbs [I believe this fully explains Paul's shift to the present tense in 7:14-25]; Paul first narrates past events, then depicts the continuing status of those who were involved in those events."

(page 454; under Rom. 7:14) "...we cannot overlook the fact that 7:5, which anticipates the argument of 7:7-25, describes the non-Christian state as being 'in the flesh.' [Yes, this is a key point. The person described in Rom. 7:14-25 had not yet become a Christian and had not yet, therefore, received the Holy Spirit (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:1-17).] But it is the additional description, 'sold under sin,' that clinches the argument for a description of a non-Christian here. ... His language points to a condition of slavery under sin's power. And I question whether Rom. 6 allows us to say that the Christian is 'under the power of sin' in this sense. In fact, Paul is saying just the reverse in that chapter; Christians have 'died to the power of sin' (v. 2) and are therefore no longer 'slaves of sin' (vv. 18, 22). ... 7:14b asserts, in what certainly appears to be an objective assessment of status, that this ego has been sold so as now to be 'under sin.' Earlier in Romans (3:9), Paul summarizes his teaching about people outside of Christ by asserting that they are all 'under sin.' Christ delivers the believer from this condition, but the ego here in Rom. 7 confesses that he is still in that condition." [This is a very important paragraph.]

J. A. Fitzmyer (a Roman Catholic scholar, *Romans*, Anchor Bible, Vol. 33 [Doubleday; 1993]).

(page 462) " 'Role of the Law in Human Life' (7:7-13)." This heading covers pages 462-472. Fitzmyer means the Mosaic Law, and rightly so.

(pages 463-465) "The Ego has been understood in at least five different senses.

1. Autobiographically. ...

2. Psychologically. ...

3. As Adam. The ego is understood to be Adam, the father of the human race, confronted with the command of Gen. 2:16, 17. So Methodius of Olympia, Theodore of Mopsuestia [I'll quote from Methodius later in this paper. Theodore of Mopsuestia (about AD 350-428), bishop of Mopsuestia, and theologian.].... ...

4. As a Christian. ... So Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin.... But then one must ask, Why all the references to the Mosaic law? ... Moreover, it is clear that in chap. 8 Paul speaks of the Christian living the life of the Spirit [the Spirit isn't mentioned at all in Rom. 7:7-25]; here it is far from clear that he is speaking of the same person. [It seems as clear as it could possibly be that he isn't speaking of the same person.] The discussion is more generic.

5. In a cosmic-historical dimension. Paul speaks rhetorically of the ego, using a figure of speech to dramatize in an intimate personal way the experience common to all unregenerate human beings faced with law and relying on their own resources to meet its obligations. He views unregenerate humanity with Jewish spectacles and depicts it faced with the Mosaic law and seeking to achieve the status of uprightness by observing such a law. So many of the Greek Fathers, especially Diodore of Tarsus...John Chrysostom...and Cyril of Alexandria...also Ambrosiaster [[Fitzmyer quotes Ambrosiaster under Rom. 7:7, "under his own quasi-person he treats of the general issue." Fitzmyer then lists some modern commentators. Diodore of Tarsus (died AD 394) founded a school near Antioch and was the teacher of Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. He was the bishop of Tarsus from 378 to his death. Cyril of Alexandria (about AD 375-444) was a theologian, he became the bishop of Alexandria in 412. Ambrosiaster (late 4th century) wrote a commentary on Romans. Actually this name was given to the anonymous author by Erasmus; throughout the middle ages it was assumed that Ambrose had been the author.]]....

The trouble with all such interpretations is that they tend to trivialize Paul's insight. The confrontation of the Ego with sin and the law is not considered by Paul on an individual, psychological level, but from a historical and corporate point of view. Paul sees humanity as it was known to him through Jewish and Christian eyes,

without Christ and in Christ (see Stauffer, TDNT ["Theological Dictionary of the New Testament" in 10 volumes] 2.340-60, esp. 358-62). ...in attempting to understand what Paul meant, it is important to keep *his* perspective in mind, which is that of unregenerate humanity faced with the Mosaic law - but as seen by a Christian...." As my comments indicate, I agree with most of what Fitzmyer says in this paragraph and under his #5. I believe it is better to see Paul speaking for those under the Mosaic Law, but leaving room to see a strong application for all mankind.

(page 467; under Rom. 7:9) "the commandment came. I.e., when the Mosaic law 'was added' (Gal. 3:19) or entered human history...."

(page 472; this is the heading for pages 472-477) " 'Complaint and Cry of Human Beings Enslaved by the Law (7:14-25).' "

H. A. W. Meyer ("Epistle to the Romans," Vol. 5 of *Meyers Commentary on the New Testament* [Alpha Publications, 1980 reprint; first English edition 1883]).

(page 266; under Rom. 7:7-13) "Augustine...in his earlier days acknowledged, in harmony with the Greek Fathers since Irenaeus [about AD 115-202], that the language here is that of the *unregenerate* man; though later, in opposition to Pelagianism...he gave currency to the view that the "I" is that of the *regenerate*. In this he was followed by Jerome, who likewise held a different opinion previously; and later by Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Beza (not Bucer and Musculus)...and many others, more, however, among Protestant than among Catholic commentators.... On the other hand, the...Arminians, as also the school of Spener [Pietists], returned to the view of the Greek Fathers, which gradually became, and has down to the present day continued, the dominant one."

James Arminius (AD 1560-1609) wrote a 200 page document (that I'm impressed with) titled "A Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans." (It's included in Vol. 2 of *The Works of James Arminius*, translated by J. Nichols [Baker, 1986 reprint]. Arminius was a Dutch theologian, originally a Calvinist. Arminians are named after him.) His main point in this dissertation is that it is a serious mistake to interpret Romans 7:14-25 as referring to a Christian. His view is that "in this passage the Apostle does not speak about himself, nor about a man living under grace, but that he has transferred to himself the person of a man placed under the law" (page 490).

Arminius included quotations from Theodoret and from quite a few others, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Chrysostom, confirming his viewpoint. I'll include part of Arminius' quotation of Theodoret (about AD 393-466). Theodoret was a leading theologian of the school at Antioch; he became the bishop of Cyrus in 423. Later in this paper I'll include excerpts from Irenaeus (about AD 115-202), Tertullian (about AD 160-220), and Chrysostom (AD 347-407).

(pages 605, 606; Arminius is quoting Theodoret from "On Romans 7.") " 'But I am carnal' [Rom. 7:14]. He introduces a man before [he has obtained] grace, who is beset with motions and perturbations of mind. For he denominates that man carnal who has not yet obtained spiritual grace. ... 'But I see another law in my members, warring....' [Rom. 7:23, 24]. ... After the apostle had discoursed on all these topics, that he might shew what sort of people we were before grace, and our condition after grace, and having taken on himself the personation of those who, before grace, had been besieged and encompassed by sin; therefore, as though he was completely surrounded by a mass of enemies, and led away into captivity and compelled to become a slave, and seeing no aid from any other quarter, he grievously groans and laments; he shews that help could not be afforded by the law, and he cries out, 'O wretched man that I am'...."

(pages 656-662; I'm quoting Arminius; the heading for this section is "The Opposite Opinion Is Injurious To Grace and Hurtful to Good Morals") "... That this modern Opinion [that Romans 7:14-25 speaks of Christians actually sinning] is injurious to Divine Grace, I demonstrate in the following manner: An injury is inflicted on grace, not only by him who attributes to nature or free will that which belongs to grace; that is, having taken it away from grace [like the Pelagians did]; but likewise by him who attributes to it less than is its due, and than ought truly to be ascribed to grace. In the last of these modes, this modern opinion is inimical [in opposition] to grace: For it attributes less than, according to the Scriptures, ought to be ascribed to grace. The Scriptures ascribe to Divine Grace, that, in the regenerate, it worketh not only *to will* but also *to do* (Phil. 2:13); that, by its power, our old man is crucified, and the body of sin is destroyed or enervated [weakened], so that henceforth we should not obey it in the lusts thereof; that, through grace, the regenerate are dead indeed unto sin, and are raised up again to walk in newness of life, in which they serve not sin but God, neither do they yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom. 6:2-13); that, through the efficacy of the Spirit, they mortify the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13); and that grace not only supplies to the regenerate strength to resist the world, Satan, and the flesh, but, likewise, power to gain the victory over them. (Ephes. 6:11-18; James 4:4-8; 1 John 4:4; 5:4; etc.)

But this modern opinion attributes to grace, that its only effect in the regenerate is *to will*, and *not to do*, that it is too weak to crucify the old man, to destroy the body of sin, or to conquer the flesh, the world and Satan. For the regenerate man, according to this opinion, is said to obey sin in its lusts, and to walk after the desires of the flesh; though he is said to do this, compelled by the violence of sin, in opposition to conscience, and with a reluctant will. ... This was also the cause why St. Augustine [in his later view] interpreted the chapter in reference to concupiscence: For he perceived, that if he interpreted it concerning actual sins, he would be inflicting an injury on grace."

Under this same heading, starting on page 660, Arminius quotes Augustine to back up this point. "When discussing these words of the apostle, 'For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do'; this Father [Augustine] makes the following remarks: 'As often as the Divine words which have just been recited...are read, it is to be feared that, when they are incorrectly understood, they furnish an occasion to men who are seeking one; because they are inclined to the commission of sin, and with difficulty restrain themselves. Therefore, when they have heard the apostle declaring, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I hate, that I do"; they commit evil; and, as if displeased with themselves because they thus do evil, they suppose that they resemble the apostle, who said, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." For this passage is sometimes read, and at present imposes on us the necessity of admonishing, that, when men take it in a wrong acceptation, they convert salutary food into poison' " ("On Time," Sermons 43 and 45, tom. 10).

Arminius is still quoting Augustine (page 661) "Recollect...what the apostle has written to the Galatians, from which this passage may be well expounded: For, speaking to believers...speaking to them as to those who were still fighting [and rightly so], he says, 'This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.' ... 'But if ye be led by the Spirit'.... [Gal. 5:16-18] ... What is 'to be led of the Spirit?' To consent to the Spirit of God which commands, and not to the flesh which lusteth. ... Persevere in not willing [that which the flesh wills]. Yet thy desire to God should be of this description, that there may not be any concupiscence for thee to resist. Consider what I have said. I repeat it: Thy request unto God should be of this kind, that no concupiscence whatever may remain which it may be necessary for thee to resist. For thou dost resist; and, by not consenting, thou dost overcome: But it is far better to have no enemy, than to conquer one. [I don't fully agree with Augustine on this point (KK).] The time will arrive when that enemy will have no existence. ..." (from the same treatise by Augustine).

Arminius now says, "In a subsequent passage in the same Treatise, when explaining still more plainly the meaning of the apostle, lest his words should prove hurtful to those who seek occasion, St Augustine writes in the following manner: 'The apostle, therefore, does not what he would, because he wills not to lust, or indulge in concupiscence [to have wrong thoughts and desires]; yet he lusts [What Augustine means here by lusting/indulging in concupiscence is greatly qualified by his following sentences. He is not speaking of Paul's consenting to permit thoughts or motions [impulses, inclinations] of lust. According to Matt. 5:28, for example, that would be sin, even though no physical act had been committed. (KK)] Did this evil concupiscence draw the apostle into subjection to lust for fornication? By no means. Let not such thoughts as these ascend into thy heart. He contended against it, he was not subdued. But because he willed not, and had this against which he might contend, therefore he said, "What I would, that do I not"; I will not [in other words, I do, on occasion, find myself having improper thoughts and desires (KK)]. 'Therefore, what I would, that do I not'; but yet I consent not to

concupiscence. For, otherwise, he would not have said, 'Ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh,' if he fulfilled them himself. But he has placed for thee, before thy eyes, the combat in which he was engaged, that thou mayest not be afraid concerning thine own. For if the blessed apostle had not said this, when thou hast perceived concupiscence in motion within thy members to which thou wouldst not yield thy consent; yet, since thou hast perceived it to be in motion, perhaps thou mightest despair concerning thyself and say, If I belonged unto God, I should not have such motions [impulses/inclinations]. Look at the apostle engaged in the battle, and be unwilling to fill thyself with despair.' "

My excerpts from Arminius end here, but I'll comment further regarding what he said in his dissertation as we continue. I can appreciate Augustine's pastoral concern here, but I agree with Arminius that this clearly wasn't what Paul was speaking about in Romans chapter 7. We don't need to misinterpret Romans chapter 7 to make the point that Augustine made here. Galatians 5:17, for example, would suffice to demonstrate that genuine Christians can, and will, have wrong desires, thoughts, etc. The flesh (old man) hasn't been annihilated yet, but as Gal. 5:16 shows, God's grace/the enablement of the Spirit is always sufficient to keep the flesh from manifesting itself in sin (I mean sin by God's definition). This was Augustine's point in referring to Gal. 5:16-18 in the above quotation from him.

I consider the qualification of Augustine just discussed to be extremely important; that is, if the person of Rom. 7:14-25 is to be understood as a Christian, we must think only of the Christian hating his wrong thoughts and desires, which he resists by the grace of God, not of the Christian actually sinning. I first learned of this qualification many years ago (about 1970) from the dissertation by Arminius. In addition to the excerpts I have given from Augustine by Arminius, on pages 611-618, Arminius quoted from Augustine's "Retractions," where Augustine told how he came to favor his later interpretation, clearly including the qualification we have been discussing. Augustine mentioned that he had been influenced by other commentators. Arminius (on page 618) commented that those expounders Augustine followed all included the qualification. I also found a passage from Augustine that confirms this qualification, "Against Two Letters of the Pelagians," chapters 17-21, Vol. 5 of "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (First Series)."

This qualification had been rejected and/or forgotten in Arminius' day by those insisting that Romans chapter 7 was speaking of a born-again Christian(s). Based on what I have heard and read, this qualification has been rejected and/or forgotten in our day too. On pages 644-655, Arminius quoted three others, in addition to Augustine, who included this same very important qualification. They are Epiphanius (AD 315-403; bishop of Salamis in Cyprus), Venerable Bede (AD 673-735; English monk and writer, who was influenced by Augustine and Jerome), and Thomas Aquinas (about AD 1225-1274; Italian theologian and philosopher). The quotations show that Aquinas, like Augustine, did not insist that Rom. 7:14-25 was speaking of a Christian(s), only that if these verses do speak of a Christian(s), the qualification must be understood. Epiphanius was born some forty years

before Augustine (AD 354-430). I'm not an expert on Epiphanius, but I know that he quoted extensively from other Christian writers. A footnote on pages 644, 645 (not by Arminius), where Arminius was quoting Epiphanius, shows that Epiphanius was quoting here "from Methodius and other early writers [unnamed] on this subject."

Methodius (about AD 260-311), was the first person I'm aware of who understood Rom. 7:14-25 to speak of a Christian(s). Perhaps he was a primary source for this (wrong) interpretation. The excerpts that I'll include from Methodius later in this paper clearly demonstrate that not only did he insist that these verses were not speaking of a Christian(s) actually sinning, but also that Methodius was strong on the need for Christians to walk in victory over sin by God's grace in Christ Jesus. When I quote from Methodius, I'll also include a brief quotation from Gregory of Nazianzus (about AD 329-390). He's the only other Christian writer that I know of who was earlier than Augustine who understood Rom. 7:14-25 of a Christian(s). The excerpt from Gregory will demonstrate that he included the very important qualification we have been discussing.

It isn't at all surprising to me that these early Christian writers, including Methodius and Augustine, made such a major qualification to their interpretation of Rom. 7:14-25. To interpret Rom. 7:14-25 of a Christian is in such major conflict with the rest of the New Testament, not to mention Romans chapters 1-6, and 8, that some such qualification was needed. But once the wrong door had been opened (even if only a crack) and had the stamp of approval of the influential Augustine, it apparently wasn't all that difficult for many, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, and many who followed them, to dispense with the qualification and interpret Rom. 7:14-25 of Christians committing actual sin.

One of the saddest things is that at least part of what motivated Augustine to consider another interpretation of Romans chapter 7 (from his original correct interpretation that this passage was not speaking of a Christian) was his very heated dispute with the Pelagians. A major goal of Pelagius (about AD 360-420) was to bring about a needed reformation in the way many Christians were living, but a major result of the reaction against the Pelagians was a major setback for the cause of righteousness.

The Pelagians advocated victory over sin, but they got into heresy by denying spiritual death and original sin, and arguing that Adam's sin only affected his offspring by being a bad example. Part of the error of the Pelagians came (as it so often happens) through overreacting to a viewpoint out of balance in the opposite direction. Augustine, in his later viewpoint, overstated the fallenness of man. (See the section titled "Augustine and Pelagianism" in the Appendix of this paper.) The Pelagians were concerned, and (for the most part at least) rightly so, by Christians excusing their sinfulness by an appeal to man's fallenness. We must take seriously what the Bible teaches about the fall and spiritual death, but this doesn't require us to teach that Christians will continue to sin. Christ came to solve the sin problem

and dethrone sin. His grace is sufficient! We desperately need to hold the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches.

Irenaeus, about AD 115-202, bishop at Lyons ("Against Heresies," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Vol. 1 [Eerdmans, 1985 reprint]). Irenaeus is a very well respected church Father. It is significant that Irenaeus knew Polycarp, who knew the apostle John.

(page 482; chapter 16, 5) I'm including this first quotation, which doesn't directly deal with Romans chapter 7, to demonstrate that Irenaeus believed Christians are enabled (and required) to walk in victory over sin. "...He has increased and widened those laws which are natural [and which deal with the righteousness of God, as contrasted with the ceremonial laws of the old covenant, which He cancelled by the new covenant], and noble, and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging, by means of adoption, to know God the Father, and to love Him with the whole heart, and to follow His word unswervingly, while they abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But He has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their father. And therefore the Lord says, 'As to every idle word that men have spoken, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment.' And, 'he who has looked upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' [All this is declared] that we may know that we shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts, as those who have truly received the power of liberty, in which [condition] a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, and fear, and love the Lord."

(page 450; chapter 20, 2, 3) "...for He [Christ] too, 'was made in the likeness of sinful flesh,' to condemn sin, and to cast it, as now a condemned thing, away beyond the flesh, but that He might call man forth into His own likeness, assigning him as [His own] imitator to God, and imposing on him His Father's law, in order that he may see God, and granting him power to receive the Father; [being] the Word of God who dwelt in man, and became the Son of man, that He might accustom man to receive God, and God to dwell in man, according to the good pleasure of the Father.

On this account, therefore, the Lord Himself, who is Emmanuel from the Virgin, is the sign of our salvation [Isa. 7:14], since it was the Lord Himself who saved them, because they could not be saved by their own instrumentality; and therefore, when Paul sets forth human infirmity, he says: 'For I know that there dwelleth in my flesh no good thing,' [Rom. 7:18] showing that the 'good thing' of our salvation is not from us, but from God. And again: 'Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death [Rom. 7:24]?' Then he introduces the Deliverer, [saying,] 'The grace of Jesus Christ our Lord' [Rom. 7:25]."

Tertullian, about AD 160-220, was very strong on the need for Christians to walk in victory over sin.

("On the Resurrection of the Flesh" [Some were denying the resurrection of the body.], *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, chapter 46 [Eerdmans, 1986 reprint], page 579.) "... From the following words, moreover, you may learn that it is the works of the flesh [cf. Gal. 5:19-21] which are condemned, and not the flesh itself: 'Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not *to the flesh*, to live after the flesh: for if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body [in other words, walk after the Spirit and you most certainly won't do the sinful desires of the flesh/old man (cf. Gal. 5:16); you won't do the sinful works of the flesh/old man (Gal. 5:19-21)], ye shall live' [Rom. 8:12, 13]. Now...since salvation is promised to those who are living in the flesh [in a physical body], but walking after the Spirit, it is no longer the flesh which is an adversary to salvation, but the working of the flesh. When, however, this [sinful] operativeness of the flesh [of the old man] is done away with, which is the cause of death, the flesh [the physical body] is shown to be safe, since it is freed from the cause of death. 'For the law,' says he, 'of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death' [Rom. 8:2], - that [referring to sin and death], surely, which he previously mentioned as dwelling in our members. [Tertullian interprets the verses "previously mentioned" by Paul in Romans (Rom. 7:17, 20, 23) of our pre-Christian state, when sin and death dwelled in us.] Our members [now that we have received salvation in Christ], therefore, will no longer be subject to the law of death, because they cease to serve that of sin, from *both* which they have been set free [through Christ]. 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and through sin condemned sin in the flesh' [Rom. 8:3] - not the flesh in sin, for the house is not to be condemned with its inhabitant. He [Paul, speaking of non-Christians] said, indeed, that 'sin dwelleth in our body' [Rom. 7:20]. But the condemnation of sin [which has taken place for those in Christ] is the acquittal of the flesh, just as its [sin's] non-condemnation subjugates it [the flesh] to the law of sin and death. In like manner, he called 'the carnal mind' first 'death,' [Rom. 8:7] and afterwards 'enmity against God' [Col. 2:20]; but he never predicated this of the flesh itself [not of the physical body itself]."

("On Modesty," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, chapter 17, page 93) "... 'For as ye have tendered your members to servile impurity and iniquity, so too now tender them servants to righteousness unto holiness' [Rom. 6:19]. For even if he [Paul] has affirmed that 'good dwelleth not in his flesh' [Rom. 7:18], yet (he means) according to 'the law of the letter,' in which he 'was' [before he became a Christian]: but according to 'the law of the Spirit' [Rom. 8:2], to which he annexes us, he frees us from the 'infirmity of the flesh.' 'For the law,' he says, 'of the Spirit of life has manumitted thee [set you free] from the law of sin and death' [Rom. 8:2]."

(pages 92, 93; I'm going to quote from Tertullian's words that led up to the excerpt just given from "On Modesty.") "...look at his [Paul's] Epistles: they all keep guard in defense of modesty, of chastity, of sanctity; they all aim their missiles against the interests of luxury, and lasciviousness, and lust. What, in short, does he write to the Thessalonians withal? ... 'This is the will of God, your sanctification [holiness], that ye abstain from fornication...' [1 Thess. 4:3]. What do the Galatians read? 'Manifest are the works of the flesh.' What are these? Among the first he has set 'fornication, impurity, lasciviousness': '(concerning) which I foretell you, as I have foretold, that whoever do such acts are not to attain by inheritance the kingdom of God' [Gal. 5:19-21]. The Romans, moreover - what learning is more impressed upon them than that there must be no dereliction of the Lord after believing? 'What, then, say we? Do we persevere in sin, in order that grace may superabound? Far be it. We, who are dead to sin, how shall we live in it still? Are ye ignorant that we who have been baptized in Christ have been baptized into His death? Buried with Him, then, we have been, through the baptism into the death, in order that, as Christ hath risen again from the dead, so we too may walk in newness of life [Rom. 6:1-4]. ... For in that He died to sin, He died once for all; but in that He liveth, to God He liveth. Thus, too, repute [reckon] ye yourselves dead indeed to sin, but living to God through Jesus Christ' [Rom. 6:10, 11]. Therefore, Christ being *once for all* dead, none who, subsequently to Christ, has died, can live again to sin, and especially to so heinous a sin. Else, if fornication and adultery may by possibility be anew remissible, Christ withal will be able anew to die." Tertullian goes on for several pages (and he had discussed this issue to some extent earlier in this writing too), arguing that the Christian church didn't have the authority to pardon a Christian who had committed a serious sin and allow them back into full communion with the saints. Tertullian wasn't saying that God wouldn't forgive such sins if the person truly repented before Him, but that the church didn't have the prerogative to do this. It's clear, I believe, that Tertullian went too far here and missed the Biblical balance, but it demonstrates an early Christian viewpoint (a widespread viewpoint) that put a very high priority on the need for Christians to walk in righteousness before God.

John Chrysostom, AD 347-407, preacher at Antioch, bishop of Constantinople ("Epistle to the Romans," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by P. Schaff, Vol. 11 [Eerdmans, 1975 reprint]). I'm quite impressed by this ancient commentary on Romans. Actually, to be more accurate, these were homilies by Chrysostom (sermons centering on Scriptural texts). Such homilies speak well for Chrysostom; they also speak well for the Christians who were interested in such homilies.

(page 420; under Rom. 7:7) " 'What then? is the [Mosaic] Law sin? God forbid.' Even before this he [the apostle Paul] had been saying, that 'the motions of sins, which were by the Law did work in our members' (7:5): and, 'sin shall have no dominion over you, for ye are not under the Law' (6:14). And that 'where no law is, there is no transgression' (4:15). And, 'but the Law came in, that the offense might abound' (5:20); and, 'the Law worketh wrath' (4:15). Now as all these things seem

to bring the Law into disrepute, in order to correct the suspicion...."

(page 422; under Rom. 7:9) " 'FOR I WAS ALIVE WITHOUT THE LAW ONCE,' WHEN PRAY, WAS THAT? BEFORE MOSES [my capitalization]. See how he sets himself to show that it [the Mosaic Law], both by the things it did, and the things it did not do, weighed down human nature. For when 'I was alive without the Law,' he means, I was not so much condemned. 'But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' "

(page 422; under Rom. 7:12) " 'Wherefore the law is holy, and just, and good.there are some that say, that he is not here saying what he does of the Law of Moses, but some take it of the law of nature; some, of the commandment given in Paradise. Yet surely Paul's object everywhere is to annul this [Mosaic] Law [now that we have the new covenant], but he has not any question with those [laws]. And with much reason; for it was through a fear and a horror of this [that is, the setting aside, in some ways, of the Mosaic law] that the Jews obstinately opposed grace."

(page 423; under Rom. 7:13) "... ..he [Paul] also shows the preeminence of grace above the Law, the preeminence above, not the conflict with, the Law. ... But if it [the Mosaic Law] had no strength [to dethrone sin and death], give to it indeed a crown for its intention, but adore more highly the power of Christ, which abolished, cut away: and plucked up the very roots an evil so manifold and so hard to be overthrown."

(page 424; still under Rom. 7:13) "... For let us not be looking at the laboriousness of virtue, but at the possibility of succeeding in it. But if we be in earnest, it will be at once light and palatable to us. But if you tell me of the pleasure of vice, tell out its end too. For it issueth in death, even as virtue leadeth us to life. Or if you think fit, let us rather scrutinize them both even before their end; for we shall see that vice has a great deal of pain attached to it, and virtue great pleasure. For what pray is so painful as a bad conscience? or what more pleasing than a good hope? For there is nothing, assuredly there is nothing, which is used to cut us so deep, and press so hard on us, as the expectation of evil: nothing that so keeps us up, and all but gives us wings, as a good conscience."

(page 425; still under Rom. 7:13) "... And so my advice is that we be on our watch against the beginning, and avoid little evils, for the great ones are gendered by these. For he who gets into a way of saying at every sin, This matters nothing! will by little and little ruin himself entirely. ... [After speaking of Esau and Cain, Chrysostom continues] But if those before the Law did owing to this listlessness come to the very bottom of misery, only consider what is to become of us, who are called to a greater contest, unless we take strict heed unto ourselves, and make speed to quench the sparks of evil deeds before the whole pile is kindled. Take an instance of my meaning. ... Are you an insulting and abusive person? a striker too? Lay down a law for yourself not to be angry or brawl in the least, and with the

root the fruit also will be gotten rid of. Are you lustful and dissipated? Make it your rule again not even to look at a woman (Job 31:1), or to go to the theatre, or to trouble yourself with the beauty of other people whom you see about. For it is far easier not even to look at a woman of good figure, than after looking and taking in the lust, to thrust out the perturbation that comes thereof, the struggle being easier in the preliminaries...."

(pages 427, 428; under Rom. 7:14) " 'For we know that the Law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin,' ... Whence then, was sin produced, if the teacher [the Law] was so admirable? It was from the listlessness of its disciples [in that, as Chrysostom will go on to mention, mankind is fallen and in spiritual death]. Wherefore he went on to say, 'but I am carnal'; giving us a sketch now of man, as comporting [behaving or conducting oneself in a specified manner] himself in the Law, and before the Law. 'Sold under sin.' Because with death (he means) the throng of passions also came in. [Chrysostom is speaking of the fall of man in Adam.] For when the body had become mortal, it was henceforth a necessary thing for it to receive concupiscence [strong desire or appetite, especially sexual desire, lust], and anger, and pain, and all the other passions, which required a great deal of wisdom to prevent their flooding us, and sinking reason in the depth of sin. For in themselves they were not sin, but, when their extravagancy was unbridled, it wrought this effect. Thus (that I may take one of them and examine it as a specimen) desire is not sin: but when it has run into extravagance, being not minded to keep within the laws of marriage, but springing even upon other men's wives; then the thing henceforth becomes adultery, yet not by reason of desire, but by reason of its exorbitancy. [The Bible makes it clear that there can be sin, even very serious sin, without literally acting out wrong desires, whether in adultery, murder, etc. Compare, e.g., Matt. 5:28; 1 John 3:15.] And observe the wisdom of Paul. For after praising the Law, he hastens immediately to the earlier period [the period before the Mosaic Law was given], that he may show the [fallen] state of our race, both then and at the time it received the Law [This fallenness was the root problem, not the Law], and make it plain how necessary the presence of grace was [the saving, powerful grace of God in Christ], a thing he labored on every occasion to prove. For when he says, 'sold under sin,' he means it not of those who were under the Law only, but of those who had lived before the Law also, and of men from the very first."

(pages 430, 431; under Rom. 7:24, 25) " 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

Do you notice what a great thralldom [servitude, slavery] that of vice is, in that it overcomes even a mind that delighted in the Law? For no one can rejoin, he means, that I hate the Law and abhor it, and so sin overcomes me. For 'I delight in it, and consent to it,' and flee for refuge to it, yet still it had not the power of saving one who had fled to it. But Christ saved even one that fled from Him. See what a great advantage grace [the grace of God in Christ] has! Yet the Apostle has not stated it thus; but with a sigh only, and a great lamentation, as if devoid of any to

help him, he points out by his perplexity the might of Christ, and says, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' The Law has not been able: conscience has proved unequal to it, though it praised what was good, and did not praise it only, but even fought against the contrary of it. For by the very words 'warreth against' he shows that he was marshalled against it for his part. From what quarter then is one to hope for salvation?

Ver. 25. 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Observe how he shows the necessity of having grace [the saving grace of God in Christ] present with us, and that the well doings herein belong alike to the Father and the Son. ... For 'there is,' he says, 'now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh' [Rom. 8:1]. Yet he did not say it before he had first recalled to mind our former condition again in the words, 'So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin' [7:25b]."

(page 431; under Rom. 8:1) "Then as the fact that many fall into sin even after baptism presented a difficulty, he consequently hastened to meet it, and says not merely 'to them that are in Christ Jesus,' but adds, 'who walk not after the flesh'; so showing that all afterward comes of our listlessness. For now we have the power of walking not after the flesh...."

(page 431; under Rom. 8:2) "... For this grievous war did the grace of the Spirit put a stop to, by slaying sin, and making the contest light to us and crowning us at the outstart, and then drawing us to the struggle with abundant help."

(page 433; under Rom. 8:4) " 'That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh.' ["so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (NASB, 1995 edition).]

What meaneth this word, righteousness? Why, the end, the scope, the well-doing. For what was its [the Law's] design, and what did it enjoin? To be without sin. This then is made good to us now through Christ. And the making a stand against it [sin], and the getting the better of it, came from Him. But it is for us to enjoy the victory. Then shall we never sin henceforth? We never shall unless we have become exceedingly supine [lying on the back; mentally or morally inactive]. And this is why he added, 'to them that walk not after the flesh.' For lest, after hearing that Christ hath delivered thee from the war of sin, and that the requisition of the Law is fulfilled in thee, by sin having been 'condemned in the flesh' [Rom. 8:3], thou shouldest break up all thy defences; therefore, in that place also, after saying, 'there is therefore no condemnation' [Rom. 8:1], he added, 'to them that walk not after the flesh'; and here also, 'that the requisition of the Law might be fulfilled in us,' he proceeds with the very same thing; or rather, not with it only, but even with a much stronger thing. For after saying, 'that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us that walk not after the flesh,' he proceeds, 'but after the Spirit.'

So showing, that it is not only binding upon us to keep ourselves from evil deeds, but also to be adorned with good. For to give thee the crown is His; but it is thine to hold it fast [by grace] when given. For the righteousness of the Law, that one should not become liable to its curse, Christ has accomplished for thee. Be not a traitor then to so great a gift, but keep guarding this godly treasure. For in this passage he shows that the Font [of water baptism] will not suffice to save us, unless, after coming from it, we display a life worthy of the Gift [of salvation]. And so he again advocates the Law in saying what he does. For when we have once become obedient to Christ, we must use all ways and plans so that its [the Law's] righteousness, which Christ fulfilled, may abide in us, and not come to naught."

Ambrose (AD 340-397; bishop of Milan; he was influential in the life of Augustine, even baptizing him as an adult convert to Christianity). C. E. B. Cranfield (*Epistle to the Romans*, ICC [T & T Clark, 1975], page 345), who understands Rom. 7:14-25 of a Christian, cited Ambrose as an advocate of this viewpoint. In a footnote Cranfield quoted a few sentences in Latin from a writing of Ambrose called "De Abraham" to substantiate his statement regarding Ambrose. I don't really know Latin, but I can give a reasonable translation: "Since the flesh fights against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, it is not a moderate [restrained] battle, when the Apostle himself a chosen vessel for the Lord says: I see the law of my flesh fighting against the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin, which is in my members [Rom. 7:23]. He himself was not able to restrain this battle, and for that reason he flies to Christ saying: Wretched man (that) I (am); who will deliver me from the body of this death? [Rom. 7:24]."

This quotation doesn't begin to confirm to me that Ambrose understood Rom. 7:23, 24 (Rom. 7:14-25) of Paul as a Christian being a captive of sin, and living in sin. It seems rather that Ambrose referred to Rom. 7:23, 24 to show that even Paul, though he was a chosen vessel for the Lord (REFERRING TO THE TIME BEFORE PAUL BECAME A CHRISTIAN), like every other person, needed to fly to Christ for salvation and victory over the powerful forces of sin.

I was motivated to see if there were other places where Ambrose referred to Rom. 7:14-25. I found a significant passage in his exegetical work titled "Jacob and the Happy Life." (This work is in *The Fathers of the Church* series, Vol. 65, titled *Saint Ambrose, Seven Exegetical Works*, translated into English by M. P. McHugh, published in 1971 by the Catholic University of America Press. The relevant passage covers pages 126-137.) I believe this work by Ambrose clearly shows that he did not understand Rom. 7:14-25 to teach that Christians live in sin, but rather that they are delivered from the state depicted in these verses, not that the victory is just automatic or always easy. I'll give some rather extensive excerpts from this writing of Ambrose to demonstrate his understanding of Rom. 7:14-25 and something of his view of the Christian life. (In the original paper I quoted some two pages. Here I'll just quote a rather small part of what I quoted there, but it will

suffice to demonstrate Ambrose's understanding of Rom. 7:14-25. I had received permission to quote extensively for the paper, but not for the internet.)

(page 127) "...under His [Christ's] rule servitude is precious, and freedom glorious. The servitude is precious, for it was bought at the price of blood of such worth; while the freedom is glorious, for no servitude to guilt, no bonds of sin restrain it, and no burden of guilty deeds, no traffic with crimes delivers it to the bondage of a servitude that is base."

(page 127) "Don't you know that the guilt of Adam and Eve sold you into servitude? Don't you know that Christ did not buy you, but bought you back? 'You were redeemed from the vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, not with gold and silver, but with the precious blood of the Lamb,' the Apostle Peter cries out [1 Pet. 1:18, 19]. ...you owe servitude to Him as your Lord and Redeemer. ... You have received your freedom in such a way that you ought to remember your liberator, so as to realize that lawful obedience is due to Him, your patron; else freedom may be taken back from you on grounds of ingratitude."

(page 130) "I admire its teaching [the Mosaic Law's]; but because 'I am carnal, and sold under sin' [Rom. 7:14], I am drawn into guilt against my will. Sin indeed dominates, as if over a slave. ..."

In this danger the one remedy is that the grace of God should free the man whom the law could not. For thus it is written, 'Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' [Rom. 7:24, 25]." This quotation is all the more relevant because it refers to Rom. 7:24, one of the verses used above in the quotation from Ambrose by Cranfield.

(page 131) "... Therefore Christ died so that we also might die to sin and rise again to God. ... We have died in the flesh, we have been renewed in the spirit [Spirit]. Let us walk in the spirit [Spirit], because we have received the spirit [Spirit] of Christ. If then Christ is in us, let our flesh be dead by reason of sin, but let our spirit live by reason of justification [again using "justification" in a typical full sense that includes the transformation to a walk in righteousness and holiness with the victory over sin]. Thus what was impossible for the law has been settled if we walk in the spirit [Spirit]. In so doing we bury the passions.... ... The law did not prevail because it did not mortify the flesh [old man]...."

Methodius, about AD 260-311, bishop of Olympus and Patara in Lycia, then of Tyre, martyr for Christ ("On the Resurrection," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6 [Eerdmans, 1986 reprint]). Methodius is the earliest writer I am aware of who understood Paul to be speaking of a Christian in Rom. 7:14-25. It's very significant, however, that he didn't understand Paul to be speaking of a Christian actually sinning in these verses, and that he was very strong on the ability for Christians to walk in victory over sin by God's enabling grace in Christ. The quotations will

demonstrate both of these important points.

(page 370, 371) "For this saying of his [the apostle Paul's], 'I was alive without the law once,' [Rom. 7:9] refers to the life which was lived in paradise before the law, not without a body, but with a body, by our first parents...for we lived without concupiscence, being altogether ignorant of its assaults. For not to have a law according to which we ought to live, nor a power of establishing what manner of life we ought to adopt, so that we might justly be approved or blamed, is considered to exempt a person from accusation. Because one cannot lust after those things from which he is not restrained, and even if he lusted after them, he would not be blamed. For lust is not directed to things which are before us, and subject to our power, but to those which are before us, and not in our power. For how should one care for a thing which is neither forbidden nor necessary to him? And for this reason it is said, 'I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet' [Rom. 7:7]. [[I don't believe there is any possibility that Methodius was correct in understanding Rom. 7:7, which clearly refers to the tenth commandment of the Mosaic Law, to refer to the "law" given to Adam and Eve. This interpretation, along with much of the interpretation that follows dealing with the same topic, helps substantiate the statement regarding Methodius that is contained in the Introduction to his writings on page 307, "Methodius is known chiefly as the antagonist of Origen; although, as has been pointed out, he was himself influenced in no small degree by the method of Origen, as may be seen by his tendency to allegorical interpretations of Holy Scripture."]] For when (our first parents) heard, 'Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' then they conceived lust, and gathered it [lust]. Therefore was it said, 'I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet'; nor would they have desired to eat, except it had been said, 'Thou shalt not eat of it.' For it was thence that sin took occasion to deceive me. For when the law was given, the devil had it in his power to work lust in me; 'for without the law, sin was dead' [Rom. 7:8]; which means, 'when the law was not given, sin could not be committed.' But I was alive and blameless before the law, having no commandment in accordance with which it was necessary to live; 'but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death' [Rom. 7:9, 10]. ... But the devil, whom he calls sin, because he is the author of sin, taking occasion by the commandment to deceive me to disobedience, deceived me and slew me, thus rendering me to the condemnation, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die.' 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good' [Rom. 7:12].... ...but the devil; that he might be manifested who, through that which is good, wrought evil; that the inventor of evil might become and be proved the greatest of all sinners. ... Hence evil, as though besieging me, cleaves to me and dwells in me, justice giving me up to be sold to the Evil One, in consequence of having violated the law. [This then is the result for Adam and his descendants. Methodius next interprets Rom. 7:14-25 to speak of a Christian, for whom the fallenness has been so modified through salvation in Christ that now he can refrain from actually sinning, but not from having wrong thoughts and desires.

At least (thanks be to God!) Methodius didn't interpret Rom. 7:14-25 in such a way as to teach that Christians cannot walk in victory over sin, far from it, but his interpretation is clearly far from what the apostle Paul intended.] Therefore also the expressions: 'that which I do, I allow not,' and 'what I hate, that do I' [Rom. 7:15], ARE NOT TO BE UNDERSTOOD OF DOING EVIL, BUT ONLY OF THINKING IT [my emphasis]. For it is not in our power to think or not to think of improper things, but to act or not to act upon our thoughts. For we cannot hinder thoughts from coming into our minds, since we receive them when they are inspired into us from without; BUT WE ARE ABLE TO ABSTAIN FROM OBEYING THEM [my emphasis]. Therefore it is in our power to will not to think these things; but not to bring it about that they shall pass away, so as not to come into the mind again; for this does not lie in our power, as I said; which is the meaning of that statement, 'The good that I would, I do not' [Rom. 7:19]; for I do not will to think the things which injure me; for this good [of never having an improper thought] is altogether innocent. But 'the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do'; not willing to think, and yet thinking what I do not will."

(pages 371, 372) "But if any one should venture to oppose this statement, and reply, that the apostle teaches that we hate not only the evil which is in thought, but that we do that which we will not, and we hate it even in the very act of doing it, for he says, 'The good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do' [Rom. 7:19]; if he who says so speaks the truth, let us ask him to explain what was the evil which the apostle hated and willed not to do, but did; and the good which he willed to do, but did not; and conversely, whether as often as he willed to do good, so often he did not do the good which he willed, but did the evil which he willed not? And how he [Paul] can say, when exhorting us to shake off all manner of sin, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' [1 Cor. 11:1]? Thus he meant the things already mentioned which he willed not to do, not to be done, but only to be thought of. For how otherwise could he be an exact imitation of Christ? It would be excellent then, and most delightful, if we had not those who oppose us, and contend with us; but since this is impossible, we cannot do what we will. For we will not to have those who lead us to passion, for then we could be saved without weariness and effort; but that does not come to pass which we will, but that which we will not. For it is necessary, as I said, that we should be tried. Let us not then, O my soul, let us not give in to the Evil One; but putting on 'the whole armour of God,' which is our protection, let us have 'the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel (of peace). Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit [Spirit], which is the Word of God' [Eph. 6:15-18], that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; 'casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ' [2 Cor. 10:5], 'for we wrestle not against flesh and blood' [Eph. 6:12]...."

(pages 372, 373; I'll include this last excerpt from Methodius to further confirm that he didn't understand Romans chapter 7 to teach that Christians will continue to

sin.) "... 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' [Rom. 7:23]he says not that this body was death, but the sin which dwells in the body through lust, from which [the sin] God has delivered him by the coming of Christ. 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death' [Rom. 8:2].... For the good which 'the law' of nature 'could not do, in that it was weak' [Rom. 8:3; Paul was speaking of 'the Law' of Moses], being overcome by the lust which lies in the body, God gave strength to accomplish, 'sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh' [Rom. 8:3]; so that sin being condemned, to its destruction, so that it should never bear fruit in the flesh, the righteousness of the law of nature [Paul was speaking of the Mosaic Law; the moral law, not the ceremonial law] might be fulfilled, abounding in the obedience of those who walk not according to the lust [or, desire] of the flesh [which hasn't been annihilated for Christians (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:17)], but according to the lust [desire] and guidance of the Spirit [cf. Rom. 8:4]; 'for the law of the Spirit of life' [Rom. 8:2], which is the Gospel, being different from earlier laws, leading by its preaching to obedience and remission of sins, delivered us [born-again Christians] from the law of sin and death, HAVING CONQUERED ENTIRELY SIN [my emphasis] which reigned over our flesh [before we became Christians]."

Gregory of Nazianzus, about AD 329-390, theologian; this excerpt was included in the work cited above for Methodius.

(page 370) "He [Gregory] says that it is in our power to do, or to avoid doing evil; since otherwise we should not be punished for doing evil, nor be rewarded for doing well; but the presence or absence of evil thoughts does not depend upon ourselves. Wherefore even the sainted Paul says, 'For what I would, that do I not, but what I would not, that I do' [Rom. 7:15]; that is to say, 'My thoughts are not what I would, but what I would not.' "

J. O. Buswell (founding theologian of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, [Zondervan, 1962]). I decided to add this excerpt from Dr. Buswell after being asked a question about his view on Romans 7 recently. I have great respect for this Calvinistic scholar. For one thing, he put some emphasis on the need for Christians to walk in righteousness and holiness. For another thing, he was the primary source for the mid-week rapture being taught at Covenant Seminary when I was there. (This view is included in his *Systematic Theology*.) I never took any classes with Dr. Buswell; he had semi-retired before I started taking classes there.

(pages 115-119, Vol. 2; under the heading, "The Helplessness of the Sinner, Romans 7:7-8:4") "... It is my conviction that the 'wretched man' described by the Apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans is Paul's picture of himself under conviction of the Holy Spirit, prior to his conversion on the road to Damascus. ... Granted that the majority of the descriptive items predicated of the

'wretched man' could apply to any person in any kind of spiritual struggle, whether regenerate or not, and granted that an uninstructed Christian might erroneously apply to himself every part of the description, yet there are certain particulars in the description which the Apostle Paul positively could not apply to a born-again individual. For example, the wretched man declares, 'I am sold [as a slave is sold] under sin' (v. 14). Paul has just said in clear language that 'We are no longer slaves of sin, for the party dying [with Christ] has been justified from sin' (Romans 6:6, 7). Further, the wretched man declares, 'To do the good is not provided to me' (v. 18b). On the contrary, Paul constantly teaches that the enablement of grace *is provided* to the born-again person. 'No temptation has taken you but such as is common to man. God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted beyond your ability, but He will make with the temptation also a way of escape so that you will be able to bear it' (1 Corinthians 10:13). 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Philippians 4:13).

There are other details in the description which apply much more accurately to the lost man under conviction than to the regenerate man, but these two points seem to me sufficiently conclusive."

I appreciate the way Dr. Buswell interpreted Romans chapter 7 (in that he did not interpret this chapter in a way that argues for the continuation of sin in the life of Christians), but I should point out that he interpreted 1 John 1:8 to prove that no Christian can live above sin in this life.

APPENDIX

AUGUSTINE AND PELAGIANISM

My purpose here is to help the reader understand Augustine and Pelagianism. We must see the seriousness of the error of the Pelagians in denying original sin, but it's also important to see that Augustine overstated the effects of the fall. We desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. Regarding the concept that Augustine (who was followed by the Calvinists) overstated the fallenness of man (the total depravity of man), see my papers "Once Saved, Always Saved?" (especially see pages 20-24) and "A Paper on Faith" (especially see pages 3-12, 38-42). (The page numbers go with the internet version of the papers that are on my website; Google to Karl Kemp Teaching.) Also see my papers on Romans chapters 9-11 and on Ephesians chapter 1.

In this Appendix I'll quote from three scholars who deal with Augustine and the Pelagians. The fourth excerpt deals with Augustine's pre-Christian background, which is interesting, and it helped shape his theology.

First I'll quote from Justo L. Gonzales, "History of Christian Thought," Vol. 2 [Abingdon Press, 1971]. I'm quoting from his chapter 1, titled "The Theology of

Augustine." First I'll quote part of what he said under the heading "Pelagianism" (pages 27-31). "...the last great controversy that contributed to shape Augustine's theology was that which he held against Pelagianism. This controversy is probably the most significant, for it gave him the occasion to formulate his doctrines of grace and predestination, which would have enormous consequences in the future.

Pelagius - from whom Pelagianism draws its name - was a native of the British Isles.in A.D. 405, while at Rome, he had his first encounter with Augustine's theology, against which he reacted violently because it made everything dependent on God's grace and seemed to leave no place for human effort and participation. 'Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt,' Augustine had said in his "Confessions," and Pelagius had no place for such quietism. ...

From a practical point of view, Pelagius was interested in leaving no place for the excuses of those who impute their own sin to the weakness of human nature. Against such persons, Pelagius affirmed that God had made man free, and that this freedom is such that through it man is capable of doing good. The power not to sin...is in human nature since its very creation, and neither the sin of Adam nor the Devil himself can destroy it. Adam's sin is in no way the sin of humanity.... Nor does the sin of Adam destroy the freedom that all his descendants have not to sin. ...

As to baptism, Pelagius claimed that infants are innocent and therefore do not need it. Furthermore baptism [becoming a Christian] does not give birth to a free will where there was formerly a will under bondage of sin. It only breaks the custom of sinning and calls the believer to a new life that he himself is to build through the use of his own freedom." Gonzales goes on to point out that for Pelagius God's predestination is no more than His foreknowledge of what will be future human decisions.

I'll quote a few words from what Gonzales said under the heading, "Original Sin and Natural Man" (pages 43, 44). He is giving Augustine's viewpoint. "After the fall...[Adam] had lost the gift of grace which enabled him not to sin and was free only to sin. By reason of the inheritance of Adam, natural man is in the same situation as his first forefather."

Then, under the heading "Grace and Predestination," Gonzales shows that for Augustine mankind's state after the fall constitutes a "mass of damnation." The only ones who can, and will, be saved from this mass of damnation, from these people who are so totally depraved that they are free only to do evil, are the ones elected by God in some mysterious way (a fixed number) and predestined to be saved by His irresistible grace.

Now I'll quote from Bengt Hagglund, "History of Theology," translated by Gene Lund [Concordia Publishing House, 1968]. I'm quoting from a section titled "Augustine's Doctrine of Sin and Grace" in chapter 11. "Sin, according to Pelagius, consists only in isolated acts of the will. If a man wills what is evil, he sins. But there is nothing to prevent him from choosing the good, thereby avoiding sin. Pelagius rejected the idea that sin should be thought of in terms of man's nature or character. Sin is not a fault of nature but of the will. As a result, he also refused to accept the teaching of original sin. Sin consists only of what man does, and because of this it cannot be transmitted by heredity, it cannot be implicit in nature" (page 133).

"Here is Augustine's opposition to Pelagius. Augustine denied that man, after the Fall, continued to have free will in the true sense, the freedom to choose the good, that is. He stands rather under compulsion to sin.... Isolated good deeds can be carried out, but these do not change the evil intent of the will" (page 135).

"This doctrine of the unfree will...implies that man is unable to cooperate in the interest of his salvation" (page 137).

"Augustine's opposition to Pelagius was expressed most strongly in his *doctrine of predestination*. The grace which is the sole source of man's salvation is God's loving will; it is, at the same time, almighty. The omnipotence of this grace implies that man's salvation depends solely on God's will and decree. God in eternity chose certain men to be snatched out of the corrupted masses and to share in His salvation. ...

The ultimate basis of human salvation, therefore, is not found in our merits or free will but rather in the will of God. [[For Augustine (as for the Calvinists), God's choice of individuals can have nothing to do with His foreknowing what's in their hearts or of their cooperating with His grace, because all men are so totally depraved that they cannot cooperate with His grace in the interest of their salvation. I agree that man has fallen to such an extent that God must take the initiative in our salvation, and I agree that we don't merit salvation in any way; it's all of grace; and God must receive all the glory. But I don't agree that the Bible (speaking of a balanced view of what the Bible teaches) backs up the ideas of man's total inability to cooperate with God's grace, unconditional election, God's irresistible grace, or that God just gives us faith (see my "A Paper on Faith").]] To Augustine, this meant that those who have been chosen will one day be saved. ..." (page 139). Augustine also taught that the elect could not fall away (see my paper, "Once Saved, Always Saved?")

The first sentence of Hagglund's following chapter (chapter 12) is significant, "Augustine's doctrine of grace and predestination prompted widespread controversy even before he died, and it continued to occupy the center of theological discussion throughout the Middle Ages and even, in part, into the post-Reformation period" (page 143). It seems clear to me that what the so-called

"Semi-Pelagians" said was right, quoting Hagglund for one last time, "the Pelagian heresy could be avoided without using the extreme ideas imbedded in Augustine's doctrine of grace" (page 144).

I'll quote from Philip Schaff, "History of the Christian Church," Vol. 3 [Eerdmans, 1984 reprint of the 1910 edition]. "The true solution of the difficult question respecting the relation of divine grace to human freedom in the work of conversion is not found in a denial of either factor [Man since the fall is in bondage to sin; God must therefore take the initiative in our salvation, and it is totally of grace (not merited), but man has some freedom of the will after the fall.]...but it must be sought in such a reconciliation of the two factors as gives full weight both to the sovereignty of God and to the responsibility of man, yet assigns a preeminence to the divine agency corresponding to the infinite exaltation of the Creator and Redeemer above the sinful creature. And although Augustine's solution of the problem is not altogether satisfactory, and although in his zeal against the Pelagian error he has inclined to the opposite extreme; yet in all essential points, he has the Scriptures, especially the epistles of Paul, as well as Christian experience...on his side" (page 789).

Speaking of Pelagius, Schaff says, "...the main thing in religion was moral action, the keeping of the commandments of God by one's own strength. This is also shown in the introductory remarks of his letter to Demetrias, a noble Roman nun...in which he describes a model virgin as proof of the excellency of human nature: 'As often as I have to speak concerning moral improvement and the leading of a holy life, I am accustomed first to set forth the power and quality of human nature, and to show what it can accomplish. For never are we able to enter upon the path of the virtues, unless hope, as companion, draws us to them. For every longing after anything dies within us, so soon as we despair of attaining that thing' " (page 791). What Pelagius should have emphasized was the sufficient sanctifying grace of God in Christ, not the goodness of human nature, which is fallen. Pelagius made a very serious error in denying original sin. We desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. I should mention that Pelagius did acknowledge the grace of God in creating "the power and quality of human nature."

Beyond the grace of God imparted to man in creation, Pelagius taught of a further "supernatural grace [available through Christ], which through revelation enlightens the understanding, and assists man to will and to do what is good. This grace confers...the forgiveness of sins...and the...benefit of a strengthening of the will by the power of instruction and example. As we have been followers of Adam in sin, so should we become imitators of Christ in virtue. ... When the inner law, or the conscience, no longer sufficed, the outward or Mosaic law came in; and when this failed, through the overmastering habit of sinning, it had to be assisted by the view and imitation of the virtue of Christ, as set forth in his example" (page 812, 813).

The problem is, "Pelagianism...unduly restricts the specifically Christian grace to the force of instruction and example. Christ is indeed the Supreme Teacher, and the Perfect Example, but He is also High-priest and King, and the Author of a new spiritual creation. ... Moreover, He does not merely influence believers from without, but lives and works in them through the Holy Ghost, as the principle of their spiritual life" (page 814).

Lastly, I'll quote from Williston Walker on Augustine himself and on his conversion to Christ, "History of the Christian Church" [Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918]. I'm quoting from his section 17. "In Augustine the ancient church reached its highest religious attainment since apostolic times. ... He was to be the father of much that was most characteristic in medieval Roman Catholicism. He was to be the spiritual ancestor, no less, of much in the Reformation" (page 175).

"Africa gave three great leaders to Latin Christianity, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine. Augustine was born in Tagaste, in Numidia [now in Algeria]...[in] 354. His father...was a heathen of good position but of small property, an easy-going, worldly character, who did not embrace Christianity till near the end of his life. His mother, Monica, was a Christian.... ... From Tagaste he was sent for the sake of schooling to the neighboring Madaura, and thence to Carthage, where he pursued the study of rhetoric. Here, when about seventeen, he took a concubine, to whom he was to hold for at least fourteen years, and to them a son, Adeodatus, whom he dearly loved, was born in 372" (pages 175, 176).

As a young man Augustine became a Manichaeon, and remained one for nine years. "Its founder, Mani, was born in Persia in [AD] 215 or 216.... Strongly based on the old Persian dualism, Manichaeism was also strongly syncretistic. It received elements from Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Light and darkness, good and evil are eternally at war. Its conception of the relations of spirit and matter, and of salvation, in many ways resembled those of Gnosticism" (page 107).

By the help of Manichaeon friends Augustine, in 384, "obtained...a government appointment as teacher of rhetoric in Milan - then the Western capital of the empire. Here in Milan, Augustine came under the powerful preaching of Ambrose, whom he heard as an illustration of pulpit eloquence rather than with the approval of the message.... ... At his mother's wish he now became betrothed as befitted his station in life, though marriage was postponed on account of the youth of the woman. He dismissed regretfully his faithful concubine and entered on an even less creditable relation with another. ["His marriage being delayed, Augustine soon found another concubine" ("Encyclopedia of Early Christianity" [Garland, 1990], page 121).] It was the lowest point of his moral life. ...

A crisis in Augustine's experience was now at hand. He had never felt more painfully the cleft between his ideals and his conduct. ... A travelled African...told him...of the monastic life in Egypt. He was filled with shame that ignorant men like

these monks could put away temptations which he, a man of learning, felt powerless to resist. Overcome with self-condemnation, he rushed into the garden and there heard the voice of a child from a neighboring house, saying: 'Take up and read.' He reached for a copy of the epistles that he had been reading, and his eyes fell on the words: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof' [Rom. 13:13, 14]. From that moment Augustine had the peace of mind and the sense of divine power to overcome his sins which he had thus far sought in vain. It may be that it was, as it has been called, a conversion to monasticism. If so, that was but its outward form. In its essence it was a fundamental Christian transformation in nature. Augustine's conversion occurred in...386" (pages 176-178).

May God's will be fully accomplished through this paper.

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