

The "Wretched Man" Revisited

is showing, then I ask his pardon in advance for intruding into things that may be too high for me, after all.

The identity of the "wretched man" has been a main question in at least three major historical debates, over and above the intramural contentions of commentators in more recent times. The three are these:

In the fifth century, facing the Pelagian claim that power to keep God's law remains universal, despite sin, Augustine came to think that the "wretched man" is Paul as he writes Romans, showing by means of his self-assessment that we must rely every moment on God's mercy and grace for salvation, inasmuch as our attempted obedience always fall short.² By contrast, Pelagians then and since have taken the "wretched man" to be someone other than a Christian. But for Augustine, Romans 7:14-25 stood as a bulwark against any idea of salvation by one's own effort, and a proof that apart from God's sovereign grace all are lost.

In the sixteenth century, confronted by theologues that referred this whole passage to preconversion existence and denied that desires to sin are sinful when not yielded to, Luther, Calvin, and all the magisterial Reformers except Bucer and Musculus invoked the passage as exegeted by Augustine to show that there is sin in the best Christians' best works: all that we do, however good by comparison with what we once did and others do still, falls short of perfection, both motivational and substantive, and so cannot gain merit in God's sight.³ So for the Reformers this passage was a bulwark against any thought of salvation by works, or by the merit of works added to the merit of Christ, and a proof that God's own gift of justification here and now — by grace only, through faith only, because of Christ only — is our only ground of hope as we prepare to stand before Christ on the day of judgment.

2. Augustine, *Retractions (Retractationes)*, lxxiii.1, II.1.1; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, I.x.22; tr., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), V.384.

3. Calvin, for one, is emphatic on this, including flawed motivation in the category of polluted thoughts issuing from an unclean heart. "The Lord . . . declares that all the works that come forth from sinners are contaminated with impurity of heart. Take, then, the name of righteousness from those works which are condemned as works of pollution by the Lord's mouth!" John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.xiv.7.1775. Richard Hooker waxes rhetorical for emphasis: "If God should make us an offer thus large: Search all the generations of men since the fall of your father Adam, find one man that hath done any one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and for that one man's one only action neither man nor angel shall feel the torments which are prepared for both" — do you think that this ransom, to deliver men and angels, would be found among the sons of men? The best things we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned" (cited from Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *Fifth and Works: Cranmer and Hooker on Justification* [Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982], p. 68).

*The "Wretched Man" Revisited:
Another Look at Romans 7:14-25*

J. I. Packer

That the term *dogmatician* has nothing to do with dogs does not, I trust, need saying. But when exegetes and dogmaticians get together it is noticeable that they tend to sniff suspiciously at each other, as dogs do, uncertain whether they can be friends. There is reason for this: too often, since the time when the biblical and dogmatic disciplines were formally separated, exponents of both have found themselves out of step with each other, and have been made to feel that their opposite numbers are obstructing what they themselves are doing. For me, therefore, who if anything am a sort of dogmatician, to get into an exegetical symposium on Romans might seem to be an act of both bad judgment and bad taste. But the purpose of the present symposium is to honor my colleague Gordon Fee, which is something I want to do; and it so happens that in Dr. Fee's massive monograph on Paul's pneumatology, a landmark study if ever there was one, a matter comes up regarding Romans that I would like to review, namely the identity and condition of the "wretched man" of Romans 7:24 — that is, the "I" of verses 14-25.¹ So I worn my way in among the exegetes for this purpose; and should my discussion merely make Gordon feel that my slip

1. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 510-11. I have written on this topic before: see J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984), pp. 263-70, reprinted from *Studia Evangelica* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), pp. 621-27.

Unless otherwise identified, all biblical quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

In the nineteenth century the mainline heirs of the Great Awakening and its British counterpart faced both the Wesleyan heart-perfectionism of pure love out of a cleansed inner being and the Higher Life act-perfectionism of unflawed, Spirit-empowered performance despite the continuance of indwelling sin in the saint's spiritual system.⁴ For these evangelical mainliners, Romans 7:14-25 stood as a bulwark against all forms of Christian perfectionism, and a proof that any claim to sinlessness would be self-deceived and spiritually dangerous.

Moral and spiritual inability in consequence of the fall, free justification as of now through faith in Christ, and the incompleteness of sanctification in this life can be established with certainty from the New Testament even without endorsing Augustine's identification of the "wretched man." To identify that man, however, as the healthy Christian in honest and realistic self-assessment, at once rules out alternatives to these three positions in a quite decisive way, and this very decisiveness naturally stirs interest in seeing how strong are the arguments in favor of Augustine's view. To do this is one aim of the present essay.

Our starting point is recognition of the thrust of Romans 7:7-25, which is Paul's paragraph unit. Having in previous paragraphs linked together the states of being "under law" and "under sin" (6:14; 7:5), and having spoken of the rule of sin as being exercised and made effective through the law (5:20; 7:5), he now sees that the relation between the law and sin must be clarified, or the conclusion may be drawn that the law itself is somehow sinful and evil. So he raises the question: "Is the law sin?" (v. 7), answers it with an emphatic negative, and then justifies his answer by analyzing what the relation between God's law and human sin really is. In this analysis there are three main points:

1. The effect of the law is to give knowledge of sin — not merely of the abstract notion of sin, but of the quasi-personal reality of sin as a driving force within us all, a spirit of rebellion and self-assertion against God, of pride and unwillingness to be dominated by anything or anybody from outside, and specifically of dislike and disobedience in relation to God's commands (7:7, 13, cf. 3:20).
2. The law gives this knowledge by setting God's commands and prohibitions before us; for these first good sin into active rebellion and

4. On this see *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* vols. VII and VIII, *Perfectionism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981; reprint of original volumes, New York: Oxford University Press, 1931-32), esp. VII.vi and vii and VIII.iv and v, and note VIII.583-84 on Rom 7. See also J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, centenary edition (Melwyn, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 1979), pp. xxi-xxii, and J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 127-29, 143-45, 161-63, 263-70.

then enable us to see the specific shortcomings of motive and behavior into which sin has led us (7:8, 19, 23).

3. The law gives no ability to perform the good it prescribes, nor can it in any way diminish or deliver from the power of sin (7:9-11, 22-24).

In making these points, Paul speaks throughout in the first person singular. In verses 7-13 he elaborates the thesis: "I would not have known what sin was except through the law," depicting this discovery as a move from life to death. Then in verses 14-25 he moves from the aorist to the present tense and describes the experience of a person who sees himself constantly failing to do the good that the law commands, and that he himself actually wants to do, and who through reflecting on this fact has come to see the bitter truth stated at the outset as the thesis of the section — "I am unspiritual [carnal, KJV, of the flesh, NRSV], sold as a slave to sin" (7:14).⁵ It is this perception that prompts the cry: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" — which is followed by the verbless shout, "Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!" and the final summary statement: "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature [flesh, KJV, NRSV] a slave to the law of sin" (7:25).⁶

Who, now, is the "I," the "wretched man" living the life of recognized and agonized imperfection in relation to God's holy, just, good, "spiritual" (i.e., God-given, divinely originating) law? That Paul in verses 14-25 is describing an experience that was, or once had been, his own, as he is certainly doing in verses 7-13, is surely beyond dispute. The suggestion that this pas-

5. "Sold as a slave to sin" is pictorial rather than theological language (as is "sprang to life" and "died" in v. 9), expressing how the condition being described feels rather than categorizing it directly in explicit and intentional theological terms. The argument that no regenerate person could say he was sold as a slave to sin, because this would be tantamount to saying he was back in the condition from which 6:18, 22, proclaimed him freed, misses this point.

6. "Sinful nature" is not a happy rendering of "flesh," though it is hard to find a better. "Nature" suggests that sin is the "real me," which in a regenerate believer is not the case. "Flesh" in Paul has to do with the person, not just that person's body, and points to the reality of desire misdirected toward earthly and self-serving objectives rather than the service of God. Sin, personified as a tyrant in 3:9; 5:21; 6:12, 14, 23, is the chameleon energy that thus misdirects. "Sinful streak" and "corrupt and deviant conation" would hardly do in a general-purpose translation of the Bible, but both phrases have a semantic field nearer to what Paul means by "flesh."

7. "Spiritual" declares that the law "derives from the Spirit (given by inspiration) embodies the Spirit, manifests the Spirit, was intended to address at the level of the Spirit" (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* [Dallas: Word Books, 1988], p. 387). The old exegesis, "heart-searching," though stating a truth, is not linguistically correct.

sage "does not represent a personal experience at all, but is no more than a secondhand account of the experience of others, or even an imaginative picture of a condition of mind into which men might fall were it not for the grace of God" is, says Kirk, "difficult to believe."⁸ The idea that the emphatic "I" (ἐγώ, vv. 14, 17, 24; αὐτὸς ἐγώ, v. 25) means "not I, you understand, but you, or somebody else," and that the spontaneous "wretched man" outcry was one that Paul had never had to utter on his own behalf, out of his own heart, seems so artificial and theatrical as to be incredible.⁹ It may then be taken as certain that this is Paul sharing out of his own pilgrimage, both in 7-13 and in 14-25. Paul never hesitates to share himself in his letters when he believes that by doing so he will help others in their life with God, and it is entirely in character for him to be invoking his experience here in order to help his readers see how sin and the law relate to each other, which is what he wants them to know.

But how exactly is he doing it? Look first at verses 7-13. Should we understand Paul as speaking here in a directly autobiographical way, narrating his personal experience the way it was because he thinks it paradigmatic of the relation between the law and sin in everyone's life? (That everyone without exception knows something of God's law, through general revelation if not via the Jewish Torah, has already been stated; see 1:32; 2:14-15.) Or should we suppose he is speaking representatively against the background of his own remembered experience, directly personating a mainstream Jew,¹⁰ or Adam,¹¹ or a human being in Adam as such, and purposefully shaping his speech as he does so for maximum universality and didactic force? (Preachers of a certain type do this regularly, and Paul was a dyed-in-the-wool preacher whose apostolic letters are, before they close, invariably

pastoral sermons on paper, however informal and chaty their beginnings.) It is hard to decide, and perhaps not important to do so, for whichever it is, Paul's point is the same — that in all human lives God's law first stirs up sin and then shows it up without offering any remedy against its invasive perverting force. Thus the Christless person's life is lived on the treadmill of moral and spiritual failure, so that for sensitive souls it becomes increasingly a nightmare of consciously not pleasing God (which is what Paul is evidently talking about when he says that after the law came into his heart "sin sprang to life and I died" [7:9]). Paul's point, as illustrated by his narrative, is summarized in verse 13: "Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (NRSV). Law is one thing, sin is another, and their interaction in each human life brings out the goodness of the former and the badness of the latter.

And now a further question arises. How do verses 14-25 relate to verses 7-13? Is the speaker here still Paul remembering himself as a Pharisee or personating a pagan moralist and so speaking for unregenerates who, whatever their idealism and moralism, fall short behaviorally and have not yet learned to thank God for Jesus Christ and to receive through him the free gift of pardon and acceptance? If so, the rescue from "this body of death" for which the "wretched man" cries out is deliverance from the final, judicial, eternal death of 1:32; 6:16, 21, 23, for which his sin-dominated life qualifies him afresh every day,¹² and his thanksgiving is precisely for the present gift of righteousness (justification, 5:17) and new life in Christ, with power for godly living (6:4, 11-14; 7:4-6).

Or does Paul's shift from the past to the present tense in verse 14 mean that now he is augmenting his account of the law as detecting sin in the unregenerate by testimony to the law as also detecting the reach-exceeds-grasp dimension of the moral life of justified sinners? Does the rest of this paragraph thus extend Paul's point, rather than merely reinforcing his appeal to unregenerate experience as showing how law and sin relate? And if it does, is this an aspect of Christian experience that shows the believer to be in bad shape, laboring in self-reliance and pride to keep God's law by his own willpower and strength instead of drawing on the help of the Holy Spirit, who is not men-

8. Kenneth E. Kirk, *Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 206.
9. Douglas J. Moo, in *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 427-28 and note 12, observes that the rhetorical use of "I" without a specific personal reference, which W. G. Kümmel highlighted as a reality in Greek and specifically in Paul in his *Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (Leipzig: J. G. Hinrichs, 1929), appears only when the sense is hypothetical and the "I" is, to use his term, "fictive" (e.g., Rom 3:7). He concludes, with recent scholarship generally, that in the factual first-person-singular account in Rom 7 "some reference to Paul must be included."

10. In *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: SCM, 1952) the late Rudolf Bultmann described Rom 7:7-25 as "a passage in which Paul depicts the situation of a man under the Torah as it had become clear to a backward look from the standpoint of the Christian faith." Dr. Fee agrees with Dunn that this is probably the majority view among scholars today (*op. cit.*, p. 511, note 113).

11. Modern commentators generally agree that the story of Adam in Gen 2-3 has had some influence at least on the wording of 7:7-13, though there is no agreement as to the relation between Adam and Paul's first person singular.

12. Cf. the following note by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), on the body of sin being rendered powerless in Rom 6:6: "The 'body of sin' is not merely the material part of a mortal human being, as opposed to the soul, but the whole person considered as earth-oriented, not open to God or his Spirit, and prone to sin. In 7:24 he will call it the 'body of death'" (p. 436).

tioned in this paragraph?¹³ Were this the case (and some have argued that it is), then the moral impotence complained of would be a pathological condition that would cease once the saint learned to live in the Spirit's power, and the cry of thanks in verse 25b would be specifically for this enabling (supplying a verb in the present tense: "Thanks be to God that he *does*, here and now, rescue me through Jesus Christ our Lord").

The alternative is that the reach-exceeds-grasp aspect of the Christian's moral life, which the law detects and which prompts the "wretched man" outburst, is the mark of a healthy believer who loves God's law and aims to keep it perfectly, but finds that something within him whose presence is known only by its effects, namely indwelling sin, obstructs and thwarts his purpose; for it betrays him time and again into doing things which at the moment of action seem good but in hindsight appear bad — meaning unwise, unprincipled, unjust, unloving, thoughtless, faithless, cowardly, self-serving, disobedient, irrelevant, and so on (see vv. 21-23). The wretchedness of the "wretched man" then springs from thus discovering his continued sinfulness, and from knowing that he cannot hope to be rid of indwelling sin, his unwelcome and troubling inmate, as long as he is in the body — that is, while his present life lasts. On this view, the verb to supply in verse 25a will be the same tense (future) as is the "wretched man" outcry, which is what in any case the ordinary rules of Greek grammar require: "Who *will* rescue me . . . ? Thanks be to God that he *will* rescue me (in the coming aeon, when bodily resurrection and transformation will be mine: see 8:23) through Jesus Christ our Lord." The thanksgiving proclaims, not present justification or present enabling, as the other views would require, but personal Christian hope, the theme of chapters 5 and 6, soon to be taken up again in chapter 8. Both the outcry and the thanksgiving are parenthetical, however, and so there is nothing surprising, awkward, or unnatural in the fact that Paul goes straight on to summarize what he was saying from verses 14 to 23 about the way things are now: "So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin" (7:25b, NRSV). Such a statement would be an anticlimactic jolt on either of the other two views, but on this understanding it is just a clinching crystallization of what God's law, which has been fomenting sin in us all along, finally tells the Christian about himself, and so is an entirely appropriate conclusion to the paragraph.

From the fullness of my statement of it the reader will already have di-

13. This view, characteristic of the holiness movements on both sides of the Atlantic that stemmed from the ministry of W. E. Boardman and Robert Pearsall Smith and his wife in the 1870s, was given its best exegetical expression in H. C. G. Moule, *Romans* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994). What Moule there says about Rom 7 and 8 marks a shift from his 1879 commentary in the Cambridge Bible series.

The "Wretched Man" Revisited

vined that this seems to me the superior and indeed only natural view of the passage, and the reader is right. But before I argue its superiority in a direct way, I must counter three common misconceptions of what it implies.

First, Paul is not describing a struggle, as is sometimes supposed, but a discernment.¹⁴ "I know," "I find," "I see" (7:18, 21, 23), as seems plain from the context, refer to what Paul becomes aware of after acting, with much or little or no conscious struggling against evil urges as the case may have been: he looks back and realizes that what he has done is not precisely the unqualified good he intended, so that he has not fulfilled the law as he meant to do. Paul's text delineates a state of frustration at this repeated discovery, rather than of unavailing struggle remembered as such. In exegesis these verses we must not forget what Paul told us in verse 11 — that sin *deceives* to secure its effect.

Second, Paul is not describing total moral failure, as if behaviorally the "wretched man" never gets anything right in any sense at all. The bewildered and distressed consciousness that Paul analyzes is simply of a very much desired perfection not being attained. If the "wretched man" is indeed a Christian, then he is one who here and now serves God "in the new way of the Spirit" (7:6), who lives not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, and who actually does to death sinful habits through the Spirit as he goes along (8:4-14). Paul is not telling us that the life of the "wretched man" is as bad as it could be, only that it is not as good as it should be, and that because the man delights in the law and longs to keep it perfectly his continued inability to do so troubles him acutely. On the view we are exploring, the "wretched man" is Paul himself, spontaneously voicing his distress at not being a better Christian than he is, and all we know of Paul personally fits in with this supposition.

All the thinking of all the New Testament writers, Paul's as much as any, moves within the frame of "inaugurated eschatology" — that is, it involves recognition that through the Spirit Christians enjoy the firstfruits, foretaste, initial installment, and dawning enjoyment of the life of the new aeon, the kingdom era of redeemed existence, while the old aeon, the era of existence spoiled by sin, continues, and the fullness of new aeon life remains future. The two ages overlap, and Christians are anchored in both, so that language proper to both is appropriate, indeed necessary, for describing their condition theologically. Justified by faith and "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11), believers serve God "in the new life of the Spirit" (7:6, NRSV), as those who belong to the new aeon; but sin, the anti-God driving force whose dominion has marked and marred the old aeon from the start, still indwells them, holding them back and leading them away from the full-scale righteousness at which they now aim. Living simultaneously in both aeons and finding in themselves both dynamics, that of

14. NIV is thus wrong to head 7:7-25 "Struggling with Sin."

their own law-loving, new-aeon "inner being" (7:22; "inmost self," NRSV) and that of the law-opposing, old-aeon "sin living in me . . . within my members" (7:20, 23), Christians have a two-sided experience: the uplifting of the Spirit and the downdrag of sin both operate, and bewildering results. Christians know themselves as people who, living as new creatures in Christ and under grace, have yet failed to do what they wanted to do and done instead things they wanted to avoid doing. Each is thus aware of himself or herself as what James Dunn calls a "split self," the "split 'I,'"¹⁵ It is the humbling pain of this frustration that is expressed, as was said above, in the "wretched man" outburst (literally, "I am a miserable human being," a hapless, helpless, hopeless creature as it seems). Who, now, is going to say that Paul would never have felt like that? or that healthy Christians today never do?

Third, Paul, though transcribing a dimension of experience that he clearly thinks is characteristic, has in this passage and its context no purpose of assessing the quality of his own or anyone else's Christian condition, whether healthy or sickening, mature or unformed, balanced or unbalanced, strong or weak, nor any interest in indicating the technique of living a holier life. Evangelical culture, with its Reformational and pietist roots, has in the past prompted the reading of these interesting into the passage, but they cannot be read out of it. In Romans 6-8 Paul is delineating and celebrating the reality of the believer's new life in and with the risen Christ, the life of temptation, trouble, and felt weakness that is lived under grace, through the Spirit, in hope of the final glory of full redemption "through the eternal love."¹⁶ This excursus on the link between the law and sin belongs to that celebration, and is there to ensure that no one hears Paul's good news as reflecting badly on the holiness of God's law. Whatever can be learned from Romans 6-8 by way of pastoral therapy for ailing and disobedient Christians, Paul's purpose in these chapters is, only and precisely, to expound life in Christ and to minister theological therapy to any who had not before grasped the greatness of the grace of God or who suspected that Paul's own grasp of it was leading him to undervalue the law in some way. In 7:7-25 Paul moves to counter this suspicion by showing that the goodness of the law as setting forth God's commands for human living is in no way diminished by the fact that it stirs up the sin it condemns, and thereby causes distress and desperation, both in those who do not yet have faith in Christ and in those who now do. The rationale, and consequently the meaning, of Paul's style and phraseology in these verses become fully clear as soon as this is seen.

15. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 388. "The 'I' is split and the law is split in complementary fashion because each belongs to both epochs at the same time in this period of overlap . . . between the era of the flesh and the era of the Spirit."

16. I echo here Thomas Binney's hymn "Eternal Light" which ends thus: "The sons of ignorance and night/May dwell in the eternal light/Through the eternal love."

I conclude by listing the lines of argument which favor the view of the passage that has been taken, and which count against any other.

First: the above view gives the only natural explanation of Paul's shift from past to present in verse 14 as he continues his first-person-singular analysis of how sin in one's system reacts to the law. To shrug off the shift as a rhetorical device for giving extra vividness to what, essentially, he has said already would be exegetically evasive and grammatically hazardous. The use of the historic present in the Gospels and other Greek literature to add vividness to narrative does not provide any parallel to putting the narrative in the aorist (7:7-13) and the explanatory comment (which is what, on this view, 7:14-25 would be) in the present. The supposed rhetorical device of using the present tense for lively comment on what is past and gone does not exist in Greek, and so the shift of tense would be gratuitously misleading to Paul's readers if it did not mark a narrative advance from past to present. Was Paul so crass and inept as a writer of Greek as to commit such a solecism? Surely that question answers itself. And, furthermore, was Paul not bright enough to see that if he did not deal with sin and law in the Christian's present experience there would be a gap in his treatment of the problem he raised in 7:7? Surely this question too answers itself.

Second: the above view gives the only natural explanation of verse 25b's following verses 24 and 25a. "So then" (ὅρα οὖν) is a connective drawing a conclusion from what has been said so far. If verse 25a, Paul's thanksgiving, is held to proclaim present deliverance from whatever bondage to sin is described in verses 14-24, then the second part of the conclusion ("with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin," NRSV) is a *non sequitur* as well as being a shattering antithesis that actually goes back on what has just been said. Commentators who reject the view for which I am arguing either assume, without the least manuscript support, that verse 25b is misplaced and should follow verse 23,¹⁷ which is, to say the least, a high-handed *tour de force*, or they read the emphatic "I" (ὁὐτός ἐγώ, I the selfsame person) in verse 25b as meaning "I by myself; I alone, without Christ; I thrown on my own resources,"¹⁸ which lays a weight of theological meaning on *ὁὐτός* which it can hardly bear and once more accuses Paul of being less than clear in his language, using words in a way that would more naturally signify something other than what he means. Wise exegetes must shy away from such theories.

17. James Moffatt, C. H. Dodd, and Kenneth E. Kirk are among those who have taken this line. Equally high-handed is the view of Julicher and Bultmann, that 7:25b is a gloss and no part of Paul's authentic text.

18. Meyer; Denney; R. St. J. Parry; and C. L. Mitton are among those who have taken this view, and BAGD seems to be in agreement. See J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 267, 284-85.

Third: the above view preserves Paul's consistency with regard to the human condition. The "wretched man" approves God's law (7:16), delights in it (7:22), wants to fulfill it (7:15, 18-21), and serves it with his mind (*vouç*) in his "inner being." But in the next paragraph Paul says that while "those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires . . . the sinful mind (*ng*, the mind set on the flesh) is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (8:5, 7). So unless we are to suppose that Paul has reversed his anthropology within less than ten verses we must conclude that in 7:14-25 Paul is describing, not a man in Adam, writhing under the condemnation of a law that he resents even as he acknowledges its authority, but a man in Christ, whose heart is now tuned to love the law and to bewail only his inability to keep it perfectly.

Fourth: only the above view does justice to the preposition *ek* ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa$) in the utterance of the "wretched man." What he cries out for, explicitly, is deliverance "out of ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa$) this body of death" — meaning, either this mortal body which is at present sin's place of residence, or this state of selfhood in which the death-dealing, death-inducing operation of sin is so painfully obtrusive, or both together. But such deliverance will only come with "the redemption of our bodies" (8:23), when the whole of our being is finally transformed into Christ's likeness (1 Cor 15:52-56; Phil 3:21): a consummation for which those who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit" wait, groaning. It is surely this groaning, in exact terms, that 7:24 voices, and this prospect for which verse 25a gives thanks. What the "wretched man" says he seeks is not a changed relationship with God in this present aeon, but the fullness of transformed personal life in the aeon to come, in which his present condition is entirely left behind.

Fifth: counter-arguments to the view stated are not cogent. Two might seem to have substance: let us look at them.

It is said that were Paul dealing with the Christian's life in 7:14-25 he would be writing, not about the law, which believers are no longer "under" as a way of salvation, but about the Spirit who now controls them (see 7:6 and 8:2-4). But, first, Christians are still tied to God's law, now the law of Christ, as a standard of conduct; this appears from Paul's early insistence that his gospel upholds (literally, "sets up") the law (3:31) and from his teaching in 13:8-10 on how the law is to be fulfilled. And, second, the lack of reference to the Spirit in 7:14-25 proves nothing: not only because arguments from silence are intrinsically inconclusive, but because Paul's theme here, focused by his own question in verse 7, is sin's antipathy to God's law, and as a man of strong and orderly mind he stays with that theme till he has finished with it, after which he moves on to develop the further theme of life in the Spirit, which he had reached the point of announcing in 7:6.

Again, it is said that 7:14-25 cannot be Paul speaking personally because

7:7-13 was not that: 7-13 show a sinner very much tormented by knowing he had not kept the law, whereas Philipians 3:6 states that before Paul's conversion he was "faultless" (literally, not exposed to blame) with regard to the righteousness of the law; nor in any case was it likely that conversion had led Paul to lapse from this law-keeping way of life. But in the context of Philipians 3:6 Paul is looking at his past from the outside, as it were, in terms of how he was valued and told to value himself as a member of the Pharisaic community, and, as pastors know, meticulous outward performance by strong and brilliant men may be a sign that they are being driven by a sense of failure, inadequacy, and guiltiness inside. It would be natural, and not in the least surprising, if this were Paul's story.

Pace my honored colleague Gordon Fee, then, I remain a convinced and unrepentant Augustinian with regard to the "wretched man."