

“The Things I Hate”: Romans 7 and the Construction of Self

The construction of the self has been a central topic of discussion throughout Graeco-Roman history and continues to shape modern theoretical debate. This paper situates Paul’s construction of self in Romans 7 within these ongoing conversations, engaging both ancient and modern perspectives. While many scholars have written books on the topic of the Hellenistic and Roman constructions of self that include thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and others, none of these extant works have explored Paul’s contribution to this discourse. Acknowledging the historical interests and the academic conversations about the historical Paul, this paper seeks to add his voice to the chorus of ancient authors, as well as comparing it to modern theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, Jerome Bruner, William Lowell Randall, and Daniel Dennett.

Discussions of the self often revolve around concepts of soul, body, and spirit; in Romans 7, Paul articulates an internal conflict between νόος (mind) or ἔσω ἄνθρωπον (inner man) juxtaposed with his σάρξ (flesh), in conversation with other descriptions of an inner self and the vessel that holds it. This paper examines Paul’s language in dialogue with other ancient constructions of an inner self and the vessel that contains it. Through rhetorical analysis, I first outline Paul’s depiction of the conflicted self and the narrative strategies he employs. I then place this model in conversation with both Graeco-Roman frameworks and modern composite constructions of identity, highlighting points of convergence and departure.

Ultimately, this study argues that Paul’s construction of self in Romans 7 reflects the philosophical conversations of his time while also introducing distinct contributions.

Additionally this research explores how Paul's conception of self intersects with modern theories of identity and selfhood.

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