

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME VII // CAUSE OF THE STRUGGLE
MAY 1, 2022

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: How do you know what sin is?

Key Text: “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (Romans 7:7-12)

Saint Augustine was a pastor and theologian in the harbor city of Hippo Regius in North Africa in the 4th century. He is remembered as one of the greatest thinkers and writers in the history of Christianity. His famous writings helped shape the thinking of Christian leaders for centuries after his death. But before he became a Christian, Augustine lived a very wicked life. He admitted years later that he rarely passed up the opportunity to pursue sin. After he became a Christian, he wrote in his autobiography *Confessions* about his attraction to sin: “There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it ... We took off a huge load of pears—not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of the forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply to become a thief... The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing.”

We all experience this attraction to sin that Augustine describes. Paul addresses it in our lesson’s text: Romans 7:7-12. Our human nature is inherently rebellious: Show us a law, and we’ll see it as a challenge to break it! Here are three things the Law tells us about sin:

1. The Law tells me what sin is.

“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’ (v.7).

We’ve already learned that “*the law came in to increase the trespass*” (Romans 5:20) and that “*our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members*” (Romans 7:5). Paul was not suggesting the law was therefore sinful—“*By no means!*” (Romans 7:7); rather, he is saying it is the way that God reveals to us that we are sinful. The law shows us what sin is from God’s perspective and then reveals our desire to sin in that specific way. We know what sin is because God’s law tells us.

Discuss: Paul uses coveting—deeply desiring something that belongs to someone else—as an example of something he learned was wrong from the law. “*Do not covet*” is the tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17). Why do you think Paul chose coveting for his example and not one of the other nine Commandments?

“But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.” (v.8)

God’s law not only informed Paul that covetousness was sin (v.7), but it also shined a spotlight into his heart so he could see the existence of that sin—and other sins—that he didn’t even know about before (v.8). Sin exists whether the law is known or not, but knowing the law highlights our sin, and that knowledge can even tempt us to sin.

2. The Law makes me aware of sin in my life.

“I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” (v.9)

Knowing God’s command not to covet made Paul aware of how covetous he really was. And his sin nature actually made him desire to covet even more! Once Paul became aware of his sin thanks to the law, he realized that he was spiritually dead and could not do what pleased God. To Paul, realizing that he was not righteous or good, but a sinner, was like dying: *“sin came alive and I died” (v.9)*.

Discuss: When has the Holy Spirit revealed to you that something was sin that you did not know was sin before?

3. The Law shows me that I cannot obey it and that I need a Savior.

“The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” (v.10-11)

Paul says in v.10 that the law he thought would bring life tricked him and brought him death. If a person could perfectly obey the law, then they would have life. But—here’s the “trick”—no one can keep the commandments of the law perfectly (Romans 3:10, 23). So, in that sense, the law promised life but brought death.

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (v.12)

The law was a wonderful gift from God to the people of Israel. God revealed His heart and His standards for right living in the law. The greatest benefit of the law is that it shows us we cannot keep it perfectly. The law makes us aware of the sin inside us; it informs us that we are spiritually dead and separated from God, and it tells us that we are sinners who need Jesus the Savior!

Discuss: When did you first realize you could not obey God perfectly and you needed a Savior? How did you come to realize it?

For Further Study:

“How Does the Old Testament Law Apply to Christians?” article at www.str.org

“Why Did God Give the Old Testament Law?” article at www.crosswalk.com

Free Online Commentary on Romans at www.enduringword.com