



**18.**  
**'Sin, law & saving grace'**  
Romans 7.7-13

**Background**

Romans 7 is Paul at his pastoral best! And in this particular passage he shows the process by which sin invariably works, by feeding off the law of God like some sort of ugly parasite.

Paul's reference to the final commandment ('You shall not covet') is significant, because that commandment more than any other highlights the essentially *internal* dimension to the commandments of God: they were never intended to be merely about how God's people conducted themselves in a merely *outward* fashion, as Jesus Himself underlined in the Sermon on the Mount.

Paul as a young man prided himself on his fastidious, *external* keeping of the commands: and it was the realisation, impressed on his conscience by the command not to covet, that the Law of God had to do with what he was like on the inside, that convicted him of his inherent and dreadful sinfulness.

What triggered this 'coveting' in Paul's experience may well have been the preaching of Stephen in the Synagogue of the Freedmen in Jerusalem (which almost certainly Paul would have been attending – Tarsus was a city in Cilicia), in that Paul had clearly prided himself on being the best budding Pharisee of his generation (see [Gal.1.14](#)) and he met in Stephen a young man against whose Spirit-given wisdom none could stand ([Acts 6.8-10](#)).

This study starts with 3 sets of questions relating to these verses in Romans 7 and it's then followed by a careful look at the passage in Joshua 7 which provides an extended and illuminating illustration of what Paul has been on about in Rom.7.7-13.

The story of Achan provides a good example of the 'dynamics' of sin, revealing in his own words a pattern that is, in one way or another, the way in which sin always 'works' – from the garden of Eden onwards. And Achan's story begins with the clear and specific command of God in relation to 'the devoted things': that's the 'leverage' sin will use – the command of God. At the heart of the whole 'process' is this issue of coveting – desiring for ourselves, or setting our hearts on, what God has specifically prohibited.

Read both passages and start with '**days**' (3), (5) and (7).

## 1) Monday 20<sup>th</sup> May – coveting

Read [Romans 7.7-8](#)

*“.. for apart from the law sin was dead ..”* (Rom.7.8)

The law of God addresses not only the ‘externals’ of our lives, but the heart. Paul gets personal here: he’d sought to conform outwardly to the requirements of the law, but the command about coveting, an internal state of the heart, found him out.

How did the Lord bring you to the point where you realised how great a sinner you were before Him?

How can the Law of God be preached and taught within a fellowship without that fellowship becoming ‘legalistic’?

*Prayer: Thank You, Almighty God, for the ways in which Your Holy Spirit uses Your Law to reveal to us our sinful state and to show us our need of Your Son as our Saviour.*

## 2) Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May – igniting sin

Read [Romans 7.9-12](#)

*“.. when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died ..”* (Rom.7.9)

The law of God acts as a kind of catalyst, bringing to the surface of our awareness the sin which had always been there, and helping us see a reality to which we’d previously been entirely oblivious. The law provides the oxygen on which the fire of sin thrives.

Read [Gen.3.1-13](#): how did the ‘commandment’ God gave to Adam and Eve cause sin to ‘spring to life’?

How have you experienced the same process happening in your own life?

*Prayer: What need for Your protection I have each day, O Lord! Help me today to keep my eyes fixed on You, to be quick to do Your will and in all things to seek Your glory.*

## 3) Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May – convicted of sin

Read [Romans 7.13](#)

*“.. so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful ..”* (Rom.7.13)

The law of God “cannot make us righteous, but it can convince us that we are unrighteous; it cannot heal, but it can open and discover the wounds that sin has given us” (John Flavel). The law of God is a ‘tutor’ to show us our need of Jesus.

**What does Paul mean by saying that “once I was alive apart from the law” and in what ways has that been true in your experience?**

Read [1 Cor.15.56-57](#): what does Paul mean by declaring that ‘the power of sin is the law’?

Do you agree with Flavel's comment that the Law of God 'can convince us that we are unrighteous'? In what ways has that been your experience?

There is something intrinsically *deceptive* about sin: how does sin deceive us, even as believers?

**Prayer:** *Holy Spirit, living Breath of God, breathe new life into my willing soul: convict me of sin, cleanse me from sin, and stir in my heart an abhorrence of sin.*

#### 4) Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May – the deceitfulness of sin

Read [Joshua 7.1-9](#)

*".. the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things .."* (Josh.7.1)

The first verse highlights important truths about sin. It's defiant at its heart, scorning God's word: it's covert in its form, lying hidden for long enough: and it's plural in its scope, the sin of one man affecting the whole people. The result? Defeat and death.

In what ways does the sin of a single individual affect the life of a whole fellowship of believers?

Why did the Lord's anger burn against 'Israel' rather than just against Achan?

**Prayer:** *Make me always mindful, Lord, of how damaging sin invariably is – and mindful, too, of the cost You bore in bearing Yourself the condemnation on such sin.*

#### 5) Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May – pastoral discipline

Read [Joshua 7.10-15](#)

*".. What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned .."* (Josh.7.10)

Sin may be hidden from others, but it's never hidden from the Lord. He requires from His leaders appropriate action – pastoral discipline is one of the key marks of the church. Sin needs to be identified, confessed, addressed and dealt with.

The Lord told Joshua where the problem lay: what means does the Lord use today in bringing 'secret sins' to the surface?

Read [Acts 19.17-20](#): what might be contemporary parallels of the action of these believers in Ephesus?

*'You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them'* (v.13): in what ways have you seen the truth of that in your own life and in the life of your fellowship?

What safeguards should be in place in a fellowship to ensure that pastoral discipline doesn't become heavy-handed or even a form of bullying?

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, that in love You discipline us: 'the dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee.'

## 6) Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May – restoration

Read [Joshua 7.16-18](#)

".. Joshua made his family come forward man by man .." (Josh.7.18)

Like a poisonous bit of shrapnel lodged in the body politic, sin can only be dealt with as it's brought at last to the surface: the Lord does that with a surgical precision. However painful and humbling the experience will be, only thus can renewal happen.

Read [John 4.4-18](#): what experience have you had of the Lord putting His finger very precisely on something sinful in your life?

Read [1 Pet.4.8](#): what does Peter mean by stating that 'love covers over a multitude of sins' and how does it square with these verses in Joshua 7?

**Prayer:** So full as You are of grace and truth, my Lord, preserve me from both a critical spirit that delights to find fault in others, and a careless spirit that finds no fault in sin.

## 7) Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May – anatomy of sin

Read [Joshua 7.19-22](#)

".. this is what I have done .." (Josh.7.20)

Achan's confession is a classic illustration of the anatomy of sin. He saw; he coveted; he took; and then he hid. From the garden of Eden onwards, in one way or another that's how sin does its damage. Make a covenant with your eyes and guard your heart.

Read [Matt.18.9](#): how have you (or might you) put Jesus' exhortation here into practical action?

Read [Job 31.1](#): how might 'making a covenant with my eyes' find expression in practical action?

The advertising industry spends a fortune bringing *images* before the eyes of the viewing public: how can you guard against such a visual bombardment?

What steps might we take to ensure that we our eyes fixed firmly on the Lord Jesus?

**Prayer:** Come among Your people in our worship today, O Lord, that we may have eyes only for You, and may the glory of Your presence be such that we desire nothing else.