

### **Romans 7:7-12 (ESV)**

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.”

<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

<sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

<sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

<sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

<sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

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We’re going through the book of Romans. In chapters six and seven Paul has been dealing with the relationship between the Law, sin, and the grace of God found in the Gospel.

Last week we looked at the analogy of marriage. Believers are no longer wedded to the law but to Christ.

In other words, the law cannot save you. The law cannot make you righteous. So the believer looks to Christ for justification, not to the Law.

Today’s passage begins with a curious question. “What then shall we say? That the law is sin?” Paul answers his rhetorical question with another one of his emphatic “by no means!”

Perish the thought! If it wasn’t for the law, he would not have known what sin is.

Then he gives an example: “For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

### **Romans 7:8 (ESV)**

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

It would seem that the commandments of God actually produced an internal conflict that wasn't previously there.

Coveting is a good example. What's wrong with coveting; wanting something that you don't have? That would seem to be the patron sin of free market capitalism.

Plus, who would know if you're coveting? If sin is defined as an action or attitude that harms another person, coveting is no big deal.

But apparently coveting is a big deal to God. In fact it made the top ten list.

### **Exodus 20:17 (ESV)**

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

If you didn't know that commandment, you probably wouldn't think twice about coveting. But the words "thou shalt not covet" seems to induce you to do just that. Herein lies the rub of today's passage.

### **Romans 7:9-10 (ESV)**

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

I want to approach today's passage with this question in mind: Is it better to be ignorant of God's Laws so that we're not liable if we break them?

In other words, if the Law sets the standard so high that nobody can attain it, why not just do what you think best and not worry about the commands of God? It seems like the law is working against us.

We're going to divide this up with three points:

#### **I. Forbidden Fruit**

#### **II. The Deception of Sin**

### III. The Purpose of the Law

The forbidden fruit syndrome goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden. The LORD told Adam and Eve that they were free to eat of any tree of the garden...except one.

Instead of focusing on the freedom that they had to enjoy the fruit of garden, Adam and Eve gravitated toward the forbidden fruit.

The New Urban Dictionary defines the forbidden fruit syndrome this way:

To lust to the point of obsession for someone that you cannot have because of ethical reasons.

Webster puts it this way: **something that is attractive because it is not allowed.**

The example that's often given are the Prohibition Laws of the last century. Instead of curbing the use of alcoholic beverages, it seemed to make it even more desirable.

Whenever the words "thou shall not" appear, human nature gets curious. It starts with "why not?". Then it proceeds to "what's wrong with it"? Finally, a defiant "says who"?

What is it about forbidden fruit that arouses our desires? Is it curiosity? Is it defiance? Is it the hope of finding something that's been missing in your life?

#### **Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

There are three principles about forbidden fruit that I want us to note. When you are tempted to do something that you know is wrong, the following rationale takes place.

#### **Doubting the veracity of God's Word**

Discounting the significance of promised consequences

Rejection of God's authority

You know the quotes from the serpent. **“Did God really say...?” “You will not surely die.” “Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.”**

Doubting the veracity of God's Word  
Discounting the significance of promised consequences  
Rejection God's authority

The lure of forbidden fruit is real because it resonates in the hearts of sinful beings. That's what Paul is talking about in our text.

**Romans 7:8 (ESV)**

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

Is it easier to resist temptation as a nonbeliever? Do those who have only a superficial relationship with the LORD have less of a struggle with sin than those who diligently seek after God's will?

**Romans 7:9-10 (ESV)**

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

On the surface it may seem that the Law provokes hostility toward God's authority. In today's culture some are saying that the law is counterproductive. People are resistant to it.

Some have argued that that the Law might cause a seeker to reject the faith altogether. *“Nobody is going to tell me how to live my life.”*

The spirit of the age doesn't like the law. The thinking goes this way:

**if the law of God just arouses sinful desires or makes me feel guilty, why bother with it?**

So where is the incentive today to study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who has no reason to be ashamed?

Or as the psalmist put it, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against thee.” “I love Thy Laws, they are my counselors.”

The forbidden fruit syndrome doesn't point to anything that's wrong with God's Law. It points us to what's wrong with us. The law is righteous. That's why we fight against it.

Paul's approach to the forbidden fruit syndrome is to point out the deceitfulness of sin.

### **Romans 7:11 (ESV)**

For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, **deceived me** and through it **killed me.**

How does sin deceive us? I'm going to list in bullet point fashion ten ways that sin is so deceitful. There are variations on all of these but I'm going to quickly list these ten. How does sin deceive us?

#### **1. Promises more than it can ever deliver.**

The serpent promised that Adam and Eve would be like God. In essence he said knowing good and evil would open them up to a whole new world.

#### **2. Feeds off of discontentment.**

The serpent insinuated that the LORD was withholding pleasure from them. God wasn't giving them what they needed and because of that He could not be trusted

#### **3. Focuses only on immediate gratification.**

The sinful appetite only thinks of the moment. The long term affects aren't considered. Just do what feels right at the time.

#### 4. Avoids reality with fantasy.

I have known people who live in a fantasy world. Sinful choices makes reality unattractive. Sin is really the ultimate make-believe world. To think that your imaginary world is better than reality is the biggest fantasy of all.

#### 5. Doesn't consider collateral damage.

Sin is the most selfish desire of all. How a sinful action affects others is a secondary consideration. People will make sinful choices and say that they're doing it for the benefit of others. That's a lie. It's all about them. Sin puts self in front of everybody else.

#### 6. Hardens the heart and closes the mind.

Ever try to talk to somebody who has their mind made up? They're not looking for counsel. They don't need advice. They don't want to talk to anyone who doesn't agree with them. Their hearts are calloused, and their mind is closed.

#### 7. Exchanges the truth of God for a lie.

##### **Romans 1:18-19, 21-22, 24-25 (ESV)**

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools...

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

#### 8. It fabricates half-truths to fit a predetermined scenario.

This is a variation from the last point. Sin deals with half-truths in order to convince you that you should follow in its path.

A husband has a whole list of grievances that convinces him that he should forsake his marriage vows. Many of his complaints may have some merit, but they don't tell the whole story.

The predetermined scenario of sin is always the same. God cannot be trusted. You have to determine your own course, and these grievances back up your case (as if you're trying to convince a jury).

#### 9. Entraps rather than liberates.

A sinful lifestyle will always lead to a loss of freedom and the eventual hatred of that which promised so much but gave so little. That is the fruit of sin. What tastes so sweet at first bite will eventually sicken you.

#### 10. Blames others for the consequences.

Sinful people make sinful choices, but there's always someone else who can at least share the blame. You were provoked to do what you did. You were a victim of circumstances beyond your control. Some might even say, "the devil made me do it."

It can only be through the Holy Spirit that a sinner can come before God in true repentance, as David did in Psalm 51 after his sin with Bathsheba.

#### Psalm 51:1-4 (ESV)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Our final point is THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW. The law is not sin. The law cannot make you righteous. The law does not save you. What purpose does it serve then?

#### Romans 7:7 (ESV)

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."

The classic definition of sin is “any want of conformity unto or transgression of the Law of God.”

To expand that just a bit: any action, thought or motive that is contrary to the nature, character or desire of God, is sinful.

People can rationalize almost any action. From the deliberate killing of the unborn, to denying the gender identity in which you were biologically born. People will defend those things and justify it with passionate zeal and think that they are on the side of the angels.

But nonetheless, sin is any action, thought or motive that is contrary to the nature, character or desire of God.

#### **Romans 7:12 (ESV)**

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The purpose of the law is to show the righteousness of God, and thus the sinfulness of man. It is through the law that we see our need for a Savior.

The law is not harsh, or prudish, or cruel. The law is beautiful, and liberating, and wonderful.

#### **Psalms 19:7-14 (NIV)**

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

<sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.



<sup>11</sup> By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

That's where the law is meant to lead you. To your Redeemer. To the rock of your salvation. To JESUS Christ, our LORD and Savior.