

Greed: Good or Bad? (part three of a twelve part study)

For anyone who responded positively to the invitation offered in our last segment, I want you to know that you have made the best decision of your life. You could not have made this choice without enablement from God, who makes all things possible. And you are not alone. None other than the Pharisee Saul, who became the apostle Paul, experienced his conversion to Christ in the aftermath of a profound realization. He too was in bondage to the sin of greed. After many self-righteous accomplishments as a Pharisee, recorded for us in Philippians 3:1-6, God made Saul aware of the same massive moral and spiritual blind spot which plagues so many Christians today. Paul describes his epiphany for us in Romans 7:7-11 –

“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would have not known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COVET.’ But sin, taking the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law, sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”

No reference by Paul reveals more about himself, immediately prior to his conversion to Christ, than this candid admission found here in Romans 7. Paul not only confesses to the sin of covetousness but also acknowledges just how blinded he was in its bondage. This revelation was a work of God, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, where Saul finally saw himself as God saw him. His self-righteous crust was so thick and deep that when this breakthrough finally took place, Paul tells us that “it killed me.” In other words, the psychological self-image which had been developed throughout his life, was blown apart in a devastating moment of truth.

Yet, his “killing” was absolutely necessary, in order for a self-righteous, money loving Pharisee named Saul, to be converted into the apostle Paul. This dramatic spiritual transformation turned a fierce persecutor of the church into the most fervent promoter of the Christian faith the world has ever seen. And if you think that Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus completely freed him from his bondage to greed, think again. That freedom did come, but only after a period of time where he “learned the secret” of overcoming greed. Fortunately for us, Paul did not keep it a secret, but shares it with all of us, in one of his epistles.