

# LAW & GOSPEL

A THEOLOGY FOR SINNERS (AND SAINTS)

*Study Guide*

*Leader's Notes*

A MOCKINGBIRD PUBLICATION

## Lesson One Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- Introduced to the concept of little-l laws, which drive and shape the daily lives of all human beings.
- Reflect on how these laws affect human beings: imperatives, self-measuring, accusation, control, and even spiritual death.
- Acknowledge that the number of these laws and obligations is overwhelming, untenable.
- Inquire about God's vision for our relationship to these laws.

### IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*For further discussion* (The question numbers correspond to the ones in the Study Guide):

1. What kind of laws (or rules) do you follow at your job? Does your job have any professional certifications you have to earn (or expectations you have to meet)? What kind of laws do you set for your kids? What kinds of laws did you obey or disobey as a child or teenager?
2. What laws govern our social interactions? When you visit a restaurant, what unwritten laws do you have for your server? For the food? For the table sitting next to you? When you visit a friend's house or attend a party, what social conventions do you abide by?
3. Some frequently broken laws: Speeding, jaywalking, texting while driving. There's also underage drinking and smoking, pirating music, etc.
4. Why are driving laws easier to break than other laws? Is it easier to talk about laws we keep or laws we don't keep?
5. Example: If I talk out of turn and interrupt one of our group members, what unwritten rules have I broken? If someone new comes to the group, how do we welcome them in? How do we interact with someone who hasn't read the assigned book chapters for this week?
6. Do you think Tom's parents were wrong to have such high expectations for him? Do you think Tom gave up school too early?
7. The leader can give two minutes for folks to write their answers and then invite them to share.

8. Consider how your interactions at work might be governed by little-l laws. What about how you spend your free time? What about family relationships? Friendships?
9. What relationships are least likely to be affected by the law? Parents? Children? Friendships?
10. Does God act a certain way if you're disobedient? Can your actions separate you further from God or bring God closer to you? We already know that God has a law—so how does that color his interaction with us?

#### QUICK TIPS:

- The best way to prepare for this lesson is to conjure up a list of all the laws unique to your community. A college town's law "thou shall drink on game day" differs from the small, rural town's law "thou shall not drink," which differs from the hip city's "thou shall drink artisan craft brews" and the blue collar "thou shall drink a domestic." Parsing out the laws unique to your community will help a group internalize the concept.
- At this point, try to keep discussion of *God's* Law to a minimum. It's important, for sure, but we'll dive more into that in the next session. This session is light on references to Scripture, and that's intentional. Next week, we'll make up for it by spending lots of time in the Bible.
- Group sharing is an important part of this study guide. Do your best as a leader to facilitate group discussion and safe sharing—it will make a huge difference later on.

## Lesson Two Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- Internalize the fullness of God’s Law—not just the Ten Commandments but also the Law in the New Testament; for example, Jesus’ admonition to “be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”
- Recognize key differences between God’s Law and little-l laws.
  - Some little-l laws are good and helpful (“wear a seatbelt”; “exercise more”), but plenty of manmade laws are *not* good (“be prettier”; “be smarter”).
  - God’s Law is actually good—the best law among laws.
- Recognize how the dynamic of Imperative, Measurement, Accusation, Control, and Death are also at work in God’s Law (it’s what both have in common).
- Introduce the idea of the “Death of the Old Adam”—the idea that God’s Law does something uniquely humbling and spiritual to a sinful human soul.
- Help readers experience their “inadequacy” before the Law they’ve just acknowledged is good.

### QUESTIONS AND IDEAS

*For further discussion:*

1. To aid this refresher, it may be good to think ahead of a law or two that you noticed between sessions.
2. It may be helpful to draw a chart on the board and let the group discuss (and perhaps disagree!) on what makes a good or bad little-l law.
3. This is another question that might bring about disagreement. That’s fine—iron sharpens iron, after all (Pr 27:17). Might a “good God” make laws about sex? Art? Commerce? Family life? Social media? This question is also invertible. About what might a “good God” *refrain* from making a law?
4. If someone wasn’t convinced of God’s goodness, how might they understand this story of judgment? It’s likely that some folks may not have had exposure to the story of Uzzah (2 Samuel 6). In *Law & Gospel*, we use this passage to show that not even our good intentions can save us from judgment under the Law. Uzzah, though

- forbidden by God's Law from touching the ark, takes matters into his own hands and grabs the ark when it falls. He has good intentions, but the Law is broken anyway. Compare this with Peter's attempt to turn Jesus away from Jerusalem in Mark 8.
5. Can you see how God's Law, if followed perfectly, would lead to human flourishing? What would the world look like if everyone perfectly obeyed God's Law?
  6. As the appendix on antinomianism points out, a less literal interpretation of Jesus' words would lean closer to antinomianism than a literal interpretation.
  7. If a chalkboard is present, it may be worthwhile to draw a two-circle Venn diagram, with "little-l law" on one side and "God's Law" on the other.
  8. For this exercise, it may be best to pick a Law that is focused on the interior rather than the exterior—laws like "do not covet," "do not be jealous," "do not hate," "do not lust," etc. The goal is to hit home that God's Law is good for us and we, to reference the book, know exactly what to do and what is best for us, and yet we don't do it: "This utter inability to do what we know to be good is at the core of the Hebrew Scriptures' view of human nature, and such pessimism is only intensified in Christianity" (20-21).
  9. If the purpose of God's Law is happiness, fulfillment, and a good life, and we know that, yet we disobey it, what does that say about us?
  10. The point is to have the group see the "second use of the Law," that God can give us a law meant for our flourishing (first use) *and* meant to show us that we are our own worst enemy and we can't live up to it.
  11. Next week's lesson is on three responses to the law, Fight, Flight, and Appeasement.

#### OTHER TIPS:

- Try to dig deeper than pat answers in this text. It will make for a better conversation and revelation. Responses like "Interesting—say more!" are helpful to keep conversation going.
- Be ready to point out attempts to undermine the fullness of God's Law, or "lower the bar." Might be worth brushing up on the Antinomian appendix (see Q. 6 above).

## Lesson Three Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- Continue to identify little-l laws in daily life.
- Be introduced to the concept of Fight, Flight, and Appeasement.
- Connect Fight, Flight, and Appeasement with the response to little-l laws *and* to God's Law.
- Wrestle with *the* great question of our study: how do we relate to God when we cannot appease his Law, we cannot fight his Law, and we cannot flee from his Law?

### IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*For further discussion:*

1. We'll be returning to reflect on this little-l law later. In addition, consider having group members write down the law they choose, to jog their memory later.
2. As with the last lesson, it may be helpful here to prep your own response to a little-l law, in order to jumpstart group conversation.
3. Some other examples: High school cliques of nerds, gamers, goths, band geeks, etc., who rebel against laws of conformity; sports fans who are more intense because they live in a rival team's city.
4. Perhaps you've even disregarded the "law of this guide" and gone your own direction with the study!
5. We're not so concerned with the correctness of category in questions 5, 6, and 7 as we are that group members are seeing the dynamic at play in their lives.
6. See Q. 5
7. See Q. 5
8. Other "prodigals" in the Bible include basically every character. Adam, for example, transgresses the law in the garden. Abraham lets the Pharaoh sleep with his wife. Jacob "wrestles with God"; Moses is a murderer; King David is a philanderer; Solomon worships idols—this is a deep bench of sinners, y'all! Consider choosing one and doing a fight/flight/appeasement scenario. Have one of your favorite Biblical passages handy to discuss this.

9. Here, you may want to ask folks who shared out loud earlier.
10. This is the second most important question in this lesson. After discussing the law for three sessions, we must wrestle with our own failures to obey God's Law. Notice that the question doesn't ask *if* you obey God's Law; it asks instead which laws you disobey. It may be worthwhile to set a timer for five minutes on a phone and let it count down. It's important to give folks enough time to process. To introduce the exercise, invite the group to get comfortable, get a blank sheet of paper to take notes, or even move around the tables to get a bit of elbow-room privacy. Honest reflection with this question sets up question 11...
11. ...which is the most important question in this lesson. Be prepared for a variety of responses, including attempts at fight, flight, and appeasement: feel free to name those as they are shared. Another response may be despair that the Law cannot connect us with God, which is good—that's the death of the Old Adam happening in the soul. Some folks may try to jump ahead to forgiveness or grace or mercy—play Devil's advocate here. Don't let your group pole-vault over the Law to land on the Gospel prematurely! Gently explain that there is an answer but that it will be studied in the next session.

#### QUICK TIPS:

- Let awkward silence ring. It means people are either processing or afraid to share. Silence is a tool that leverages the discomfort of awkwardness against the fear of sharing.

## Lesson Four Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- See how Jesus opens up a new non-law channel of relationship with God
- Expose readers to the dichotomies of news/knowledge and wage/gift
- Explore in depth, from one's own experience, how forgiveness, justification, and citizenship might change a person's Christian disposition.
- Internalize (perhaps more than before) how radically different it is to relate to God through the Gospel, versus the Law.

### IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*For further discussion:*

1. Some examples to get the conversation started: Hippie Flowerchild Jesus, Political Jesus (both sides of the aisle), Nice Jesus, Moral Jesus, Macho Manly Jesus, etc.
2. If Jesus is, for example, a peace activist, then hippies will flock to appease him, soldiers and military personnel will fight against him, and most average folks will flee from him because he has no relevance to their daily lives.
3. It may be helpful to reflect on the previous three lessons here: Christ is the end of imperative, measurement, accusation, control, and death, and so there's no need to fight, flee, or appease, even if we feel like there is!
4. Think of an example on your own to help spark discussion. Some real life examples: Buying flowers to make up for an argument; bringing donuts to the office to improve morale; cooking dinner to reciprocate "bedroom romance"; giving money to grandkids with the expectation of seeing them more often.
5. Again, be prepared with your own example. Think about the news of a family birth, the news of a job offer, the news of good fortune for an acquaintance.
6. This question may not fly if a strong group dynamic hasn't been formed—so be prepared to be appropriately vulnerable with an answer of your own to help kick start the discussion.
7. Making a list on a chalkboard would be helpful here.



8. Some basic, unearned benefits of being a US citizen: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, right to due process, right to vote, etc. The corollary is that being a citizen in God's kingdom also comes with its own list of perks purchased by Jesus's death and resurrection; for example, eternal life and the promise of a resurrection, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the comfort that the future has been secured, the lifting of the burden of a past that no longer defines you, forgiveness, and justification.
9. Questions 9, 10, and 11 are all for personal, internal reflection. Give folks some time to think and pray, reserving two minutes for each question. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance in this time.
10. See Q.9
11. See Q.9
12. This is where the group can share any conclusions they've drawn from the previous six minutes of prayerful reflection.

## Lesson Five Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- Reflect on how complicated the idea of “fruit” can be.
- Reinforce the dichotomy between one-way and two-way love.
- Recognize that the “fruits of the Gospel” are not a set list—the Gospel can affect dispositions in all sorts of ways that the law, big-L or little, cannot.
- Internalize that objective comfort may not *feel* as good as subjective comfort.

### IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*For further discussion:*

1. Some examples of one-way love: parents and kids, pastors and parishioners, close friends. (Note: these will all be intimate relationships!) Some examples of two-way love: teachers, police, basically everyone else.
2. This question should help sharpen the focus between one-way and two-way love. If the group shares examples from the book, that’s great! It means they’re getting it!
3. Again, be prepared to grease the wheels with some examples of your own.
4. Breaking down these “fruits” is a helpful exercise, but a tedious one as well. The idea is to help the group ask: here are these “fruits,” now what is the environment, weather, and atmosphere that these fruits grow best in? The answer is one-way love.
5. See Q. 4
6. See Q. 4
7. See Q. 4
8. See Q. 4
9. See Q. 4
10. See Q. 4
11. To ask the question is to answer it! Of course not. Don’t spend much time here.

12. No pressure with this question. The Gospel is true regardless of whether or not we feel it or see its fruits. It's true because Jesus died and rose again—an objective fact. But when we don't "feel it" to be true, it makes the Christian life harder.
13. Speaking of fruit, let's see if this study is bearing any fruit! Ha. This will give you some good feedback leading into the next session.

## Lesson Six Notes

### GOALS

*To have group members:*

- Recognize the scope of what laws can accomplish
- Recognize the scope of what the Gospel can accomplish
- Experiment with using this distinction to gain insight into issues of daily life
- Identify how this distinction might be useful to the Church

### IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*For further discussion:*

1. *Humility, receptivity, gratitude, love, spontaneity, humor, freedom, and comfort* are the ones from the book, though, really, any redeemed state or blessed emotion is probably an acceptable answer.
2. A chalkboard and Venn diagram would again be useful here.
3. It would be good to have an answer prepped for both scenarios in this question. Hopefully your group will recognize how wonderful it is to expect the law and receive the gospel and how utterly defeating it is to expect the gospel and receive the law (which is, for example, what happens in so many churches).
4. Here's the trick to these role-plays in 5, 6, and 7. There are no right answers, only good answers. Lots of folks can imagine different endings to these scenarios, and the point is to show that the law/gospel dynamic is at work in our interactions with our neighbors. Depending on the setup, you can have the group break down into smaller units to discuss and argue with themselves, then share with the other groups.
5. The affair scenario is admittedly a bit dark, but, unlike many contrived theological frameworks, Law and Gospel is very clearly at play in dark moments like adultery, abuse, etc.
6. This is the easiest of the three. Saved the easy one for last.
7. A quick glimpse of self-reflection, that's all. No need to dwell on this question.
8. Objective comfort is the last fruit—and perhaps the most important. In the task of drawing people toward “objective comfort,” we'll find that law and gospel help us flex our evangelistic muscles!

9. This is a tricky question. You may want to encourage your group to avoid self-prescribing actions and steer the conversation towards the ways that they have seen the Gospel affect themselves and others.
10. Consider, especially in answering these questions, how your language reflects either the law (“We *should* be doing this or that”) or the gospel. See: “Appendix: Distinguishing Between Law and Gospel” (85).

#### QUICK TIPS:

- It may be good to have page 93 bookmarked to discuss how the Gospel “may” affect change, but the Law “cannot” affect change. Especially for the role-plays, it’s important that the Gospel doesn’t sink in as a way to engineer behavior change (that’s usually what it means to be passive aggressive).
- At this point, the light bulb may click that Law and Gospel aren’t core teachings in someone’s church. Sadly, this is the case for most Christians. The best way to handle this disappointment is to provide a reminder that “the law” won’t be the thing that a Christian can use to change his or her church culture! If we want to see change, it will come through the agency of the Gospel, God’s one-way love to sinners.
- This lesson has fewer questions than the others—here are two ways you can fill the extra time:
  - Open up the floor for free discussion. Take some time to let folks process verbally if they haven’t yet had a chance.
  - Solicit some feedback from the group. Feel free to share their thoughts with us at [info@mbird.com](mailto:info@mbird.com). We’d love to keep updating this study guide to better suit both the leader and the group member! *Semper reformanda*, baby!

*This little guide was written and arranged by Bryan Jarrell and is intended as a companion to Law and Gospel: A Theology for Sinners (and Saints), by Will McDavid, Ethan Richardson, and David Zahl. Brought to you by Mockingbird Ministries. 2016.*