

45-Minute Small Group Bible Study

GOD'S LAW

The Christian Faith, pages 19-21

Purpose: To understand God's Law as his good and loving moral will, written into creation and the human conscience, revealed clearly in the Ten Commandments and clarified by Jesus and the apostles, and to distinguish what the Law does - showing sin, warning of judgment, and guiding Christian life - from what it cannot do: save sinners.

Main Truth: God's Law is holy, righteous, good, and loving. It expresses the Creator's moral will, demands perfect love for God and neighbor, exposes and condemns sin, and guides believers in a God-pleasing life. Because the Law demands complete obedience, no one can be justified by works of the Law. God uses this alien work of judgment to prepare sinners for his proper work of mercy in the Gospel.

1. Opening Prayer - 2 minutes

Holy God, your Law is good because you are good. Give us ears to hear it without softening its demands or using it to exalt ourselves over others. Show us our sin, teach us your good will, and use your Law to drive us away from self-righteousness and toward the mercy you give in Christ. Amen.

2. Opening Discussion - 3 minutes

Begin with one or two questions:

1. When people hear "God's Law," do they tend to think of arbitrary rules, loving guidance, judgment, or something else?
2. Why do human beings often want moral standards for other people but resist having those standards judge themselves?
3. What is the difference between saying the Law is good and saying the Law can save us?

3. Read the Doctrinal Statement - 2 minutes

Have one person read the doctrinal statement for "God's Law" on page 19. Listen for where the Law comes from, how it is revealed, what it demands, what it does to sinners, and how God uses it in relation to the Gospel.

4. God's Moral Order Belongs to His Good Creation - 5 minutes

The chapter begins by calling God's Law his "loving design and moral will woven into the fabric of creation." The first passages on the following page locate moral order within a world upheld and ordered by the Creator.

Read: Hebrews 1:3; Proverbs 3:19

God sustains all things by his powerful word, and the LORD founded the earth by wisdom.

Discuss:

1. What do these passages suggest about creation as ordered rather than morally meaningless?
2. Why would the Creator's wisdom and sustaining word matter for how creatures ought to live?

Read: Romans 7:12

Paul calls the law holy and the commandment holy, righteous, and good.

Discuss:

1. How does this correct the idea that the Law itself is the problem?
2. If the Law is good, where does the conflict between sinners and the Law come from?

Read: Romans 2:14-15

Gentiles who do not possess the written Mosaic law nevertheless show the work of the law written on their hearts, with conscience accusing or defending them.

Discuss:

1. What does conscience reveal about humanity's moral awareness?
2. Why is conscience real but also unreliable when sin has blurred and distorted our knowledge?

Key Insight: God's Law is not an arbitrary set of divine preferences. It reflects the good order of the Creator and is therefore good for creatures. Sin does not make the Law bad; sin makes us resist the good Law.

5. God Revealed His Law Clearly in the Ten Commandments - 4 minutes

Read: Deuteronomy 4:13

God declares his covenant command and writes the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone.

Discuss:

1. Why was written revelation necessary if human beings already possessed conscience?
2. How does the written Law clarify what sin has blurred in the human heart?
3. What is gained by receiving the Commandments as God's own words rather than merely cultural wisdom?

6. Jesus Fulfills and Clarifies the Law - 4 minutes

Read: John 1:17; Romans 13:10

The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Paul adds that love is the fulfillment of the law.

Discuss:

1. How can the Law be God's good gift and yet be distinguished from the grace that comes in Christ?
2. What does "love is the fulfillment of the law" say about the goal behind the commandments?

Read: Matthew 5:17, 21-22; 7:29

Jesus does not abolish the Law but fulfills it. He authoritatively exposes the heart-level reach of commandments such as "You shall not murder."

Discuss:

1. How does Jesus move the Law beyond outward behavior to thoughts, attitudes, and desires?
2. Why does this make the Law's demand deeper rather than easier?

7. The Essence of the Law Is Perfect Love - 4 minutes

Read: Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus summarizes the Law as wholehearted love for God and love for one's neighbor.

Discuss:

1. How do these two commands summarize rather than replace the rest of God's moral will?
2. Why is biblical love more demanding than simply being nice or avoiding obvious harm?

Read: Matthew 5:48

Jesus says, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Discuss:

1. What standard does Jesus set for obedience?
2. How does this verse dismantle the strategy of comparing ourselves with people who seem worse than we are?

8. The Law Exposes Sin - 4 minutes

Read: Romans 7:7

Paul says that he would not have recognized coveting as sin if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Discuss:

1. How does the Law name and expose desires that we might otherwise excuse?
2. Why is this exposing work painful but necessary?

Read: Romans 3:19-20

The Law silences every mouth, subjects the whole world to God's judgment, and gives knowledge of sin; no one is declared righteous by works of the Law.

Discuss:

1. What happens to boasting when the Law does its full work?
2. According to Paul, what can the Law give us - and what can it not give us?

3. Why is “try harder” not the Christian answer to guilt before God?

9. The Law Warns of God’s Righteous Judgment - 4 minutes

Read: Romans 1:18; 3:22-23

God’s wrath is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness, and there is no difference because all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.

Discuss:

1. Why does the universality of sin make the Law a leveler rather than a weapon for one group to condemn another?
2. How does God’s wrath show that evil matters morally and personally to God?

Key Insight: The Law’s condemning work is what the chapter calls God’s “alien work.” God truly judges sin, but judgment is not the final thing he desires to do with sinners. He uses the Law to strip away false refuge so that mercy may be received as mercy.

10. The Law Guides Believers, but Mercy Must Come from the Gospel - 4 minutes

Read: Romans 11:32

Paul says that God imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all.

Discuss:

1. How does this verse hold together the exposure of disobedience and God’s purpose of mercy?
2. Why must mercy come as gift rather than as a reward for improved Law-keeping?

The doctrinal statement also says the Law guides Christians in living a God-pleasing life. The same commandments that condemn us when treated as a path to justification become a good description of love when received by people who live from God’s grace.

1. How can a Christian hear the same command both as an accusation against sin and as loving guidance for a new life?
2. What keeps Christian obedience from becoming an attempt to earn God’s favor?

11. Bringing It Together - 2 minutes

God’s Law is holy, righteous, good, and loving. It is woven into creation, witnessed by conscience, revealed in the Ten Commandments, fulfilled and clarified by Jesus, and summarized as perfect love for God and neighbor. The Law exposes sin, silences self-righteousness, warns of judgment, and guides believers - but it cannot justify or save. Mercy must come from the Gospel.

12. Application Questions - 5 minutes

Choose two or three:

1. Which of the Law's functions - exposing sin, warning of judgment, or guiding life - do you most readily recognize?
2. Where are you tempted to lower the Law's standard so that you can feel righteous by comparison?
3. How does Jesus' summary of the Law as love deepen rather than relax God's commands?
4. What is the difference between obeying in order to earn God's favor and obeying because God has already shown mercy?
5. How can the Law and Gospel distinction protect Christians from both self-righteousness and moral indifference?

13. Closing Prayer - 2 minutes

Righteous and merciful God, your Law is holy, good, and wise. Forgive us for resisting it, weakening its demands, or using it to compare ourselves with others. Let your commandments expose our sin and guide our lives, but never let us trust our obedience as the basis of your favor. Silence our boasting and turn us toward the mercy you freely give in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled your Law for us and gives us a new heart to love you and our neighbors. Amen.