WHEN GOD CALLS YOU TO SOMETHING NEW

Retirement, Change, and Life’s Unexpected Curve Ball

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

A Lawyer’s Exit Strategy by Brent Amato
A Curve Ball Or A Perfect Pitch? by Tim Klenk
How Much Is Enough? by Michael Wang
Law students should read stuff outside of the law school curriculum.

They should read fiction, long-form essays, book reviews, and news – and anything else they enjoy. Law students, like other human beings, are better when they read and read broadly. This is not controversial. Unless, of course, you’re a law student.

But I want to take it even further: Christian law students should also read law-related resources as a matter of stewardship of their calling before God.

Christian students need help navigating the sometimes choppy seas of the American legal academy as disciples of Jesus. There are books, essays, and law review articles that can give just that sort of assistance; however, law students are generally less than enthusiastic (to put it mildly) about the idea of more reading in the throes of such a heavy load of it.

I’ll try to briefly make my case. As I do so, I’ll proceed on the assumption that everyone knows that we should read fiction, literature, history, biography, comedy, essays, philosophy, theology, and memoirs as a matter of course, and I’ll instead focus on why law students need to read extra law stuff even in the midst of law school.

Why Law Students Should Read Law Stuff Outside the Law School Curriculum

On the most basic level, those called to be law students are duty-bound to seek to know God’s purpose for lawyers and for law itself.

It may have been easier in the “old days,” when the curriculum contained the case laws of the Old Testament, foundations in moral philosophy, and readings on the relationship between God’s law and man’s law. But those old days are long gone, if they ever existed at all. These days, to become acquainted, for example, with ideas on the Law of Nature, natural law, biblical law, Christian jurisprudence, or vocational stewardship, a student has to “double study.” That is, faithful law students must study as required for law school, but additional supplemental
study is required to chase after the full story and import of the materials already studied.

It seems unfair, but there you have it.

Objection!

I anticipate at least two objections. First, if all truth is God’s truth, as we often rightly say, 1 isn’t faithful study of the course materials really all I need to know as a Christian law student? It is a good start, of course, particularly for law students who have a thoroughgoing biblical understanding of the world and the philosophical and theological background to discern the assumptions inherent in the course materials. But many of us do not have that sort of intellectual foundation.

The main issue is that the underlying presumptions of most American law professors regarding the nature and purpose of law are at odds with Christian views of law. For example, those who believe that law is simply a tool for social engineering will come to different conclusions about a host of systemic choices than those who believe that law is rooted in the moral order of the universe. Likewise, those who see law as transcendent, reflecting the character of a loving and just God, will have very different views of what tort law and contract law and human rights law ought to be than those who believe that pragmatism is the philosophy that drives our jurisprudential choices. Moreover, legal positivists come to different conclusions than natural law advocates on every conceivable issue. If these distinctions matter, even sometimes, then understanding the distinctions matters, too.

A second objection is that “I have too much to read already. How am I supposed to double study and be faithful to get good grades?” In short, if faithful study is the right thing to do, then grades are a secondary concern. Yet if this burden is laid on us by the Lord, then He will be faithful to multiply our time and give us all we need to succeed. At the same time, we should remember that “faithfulness” to God does not always neatly match up with our notions of “success.”

Besides, if we have to time to binge watch “Stranger Things,” eat dinner, and play intramural softball, 2 we have time for a little extra reading.

When I was a law student, I was convinced that I was busier than I would ever be in my entire life. I was wrong. I was more at leisure than I could have ever imagined. Law school is a crucial and formative time, of course, but not only for the development our analytical and analogical reasoning skills and knowledge of the law. It is also the time of life where our habits are actually practiced in order to take hold, a season where our worldview is shaped, and the years when we learn to prioritize the demands of life in light of the demands the law. It is not easy to be faithful in the grip of the competition and buzz of law school. What better time to develop lifelong reading practices that help shape us toward Christ?

What Sort of Law-Related Reading Might Law Students Consider in Law School?

My suggestion is that law students gear their “supplemental” reading toward gaps in their theological foundations and with an eye toward examples of Christian thinking in the legal field. I offer suggestions only, and only in a few categories. The best source for recommendations come from Christian professors and leaders in a student’s personal sphere.
Suggested Resources for Double Study

Faith and Study: Being a Student to the Glory of God (General Resources)


Vocation and Calling: What Might it Mean to be a Christian Professional?

- Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (2014)

Foundations of Law


Legal History from a Christian Perspective


Legal Topics

- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- Jeffrey Tuomala, “Christ’s Atonement as the Model for Civil Justice” (1993)

May the Lord direct you as you seek to be faithful to walk—and read—out your calling to the law.

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END NOTES

1. Following Augustine, Aquinas, and John Calvin, among many, many others.
2. And law students SHOULD take time for these things, but that’s another column.
3. Arranged by length—shortest to longest—to help students decide what to tackle!
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