

BIBLE STUDY BRIEFS

INTRODUCTION

These "Bible study briefs" are deliberately informal. They are structured so that they can be considered in a short 20-minute session or become the basis for an hour-long discussion.

The studies are intended to provide you with accessible, usable and *brief* Bible studies on topics that touch on the peculiar needs, problems and dilemmas that confront Christians in the legal profession.

No formal leader is required. After reading the brief scriptural passage (perhaps with a couple different translations available in the group to add nuances of meaning), use the questions as prods for discussion. Please add your own questions, because the concerns and interests of each study group are different.

Some discussion "Do's":

- 1 **DO** resist the temptation to make Bible study a mere intellectual inquiry or to parade your finely tuned analytical skills
- 2 **DO** provoke each other into finding concrete ways to apply and incorporate scriptural insights into your lives.
3. **DO** commit yourselves to encouraging each other to stick to these commitments through friendship and prayer.
- 4 **DO** share new questions that you develop with other chapter leaders and with CLS. Our mailing address: Christian Legal Society, Membership Ministries, ~~P.O. Box 687, Annandale, VA 22008~~
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A PARABLE TOLD IN RESPONSE TO A LAWYER'S QUESTION

Legislation often seems designed not to increase the obligations owed by persons to one another, but to define and thereby limit them. True or false? The Parable of the Good Samaritan has become so familiar that many of us have lost its rather radical religious message. Jesus' parable is told in response to the questions of a lawyer seeking to ascertain the exact perimeters of his obligations under the Law of Moses. Study this familiar parable once more, but this time, emphasize the Gospel context in which the story was told.

Luke 10:25-37

- 1 Does Jesus claim in this passage to offer a new ethic or an unusual summary of the law? What implications does your answer have?
- 2 How does Jesus define the scope of "duty"? (Compare with tort law concepts of duty, especially the "Good Samaritan" doctrine.) Is this a *legal* concept? In what way (if at all) is Jesus' answer responsive to this lawyer's question?
- 3 Verse 29 states that the lawyer pressed the issue "desiring to justify himself." Compare this with the idea of "limiting constructions" or "saving constructions" in law today. Do we offer limiting construction of moral obligations in order to justify ourselves?
- 4 Corollary (special for philosophy majors): Does Jesus recognize an action/inaction distinction for ethical conduct? If not, haven't the priest and Levite behaved as immorally as the robbers?
- 5 Compare the passage with Mark 10:17-22 another in which Jesus shoots down a "limiting construction" of God's demands.
- 6 So what? How, *specifically*, will your answers to any of these questions affect your life *this week*? (And, are you willing to take that question seriously? ■)

THE VALUE OF A RESUME

Paul, a skilled lawyer and consummate briefwriter (ever studied Galatians or Romans as "legal" argumentation?), occasionally uses his personal story to support his points. In this passage he makes an unusual argumentative use of his impressive pre-conversion lawyer's resume. Consider this passage as you prepare your resumes and start to compile the credentials with which you will dazzle interviewers during the job-hunt season.

Philippians 3:2-16

- 1 The first of this passage is a diatribe against coerced circumcision of converts. Does it have implications that go beyond its historical context? How would you characterize Paul's style in verses 2-3?
- 2 Paul reveals his impressive resume. What would that resume look like in today's terms?
- 3 In three places, Paul uses marketplace terminology ("profit/loss") to make comparisons with his resume. Describe these comparisons and the attitude toward the priorities they represent.
- 4 Does Paul mean to use his credentials to support his argument against circumcision (verse 4) or as a pile of "refuse" (the Greek word is vulgar and literally means "crap") to be discarded?
- 5 What does your resume say? What do you think the "value" of your resume is? (Define "value" any and every way you like.) Be candid about the practical necessities of setting forth one's qualifications in the legal job market.
- 6 Compare Philippians 2:5-11 with the first passage. Any connections?
- 7 Do you keep a "religious resume"?
- 8 Can a Christian be a credential-monger? What (and how) do you draw the line? Discuss this. *Apply* it ■

RESISTANCE TO EVIL

Some of the most difficult passages in the Bible are not those that are hard to interpret but those where Jesus' meaning seems pretty clear. "Turn the other cheek" appears not to have been a mere aspirational proverb, but part of the more general command not to react against one who does evil to you. Examine the implications of Jesus' teaching for a profession of rights, remedies, reparations and recrimination.

Matthew 5:38-48

1. Does Jesus mean these commands to be taken literally or is he proposing an impossible ethic just to show us how hopeless it is to be "righteous" by conduct? Which is the *harder* reading of the text?
2. Verse 40 refers to a lawsuit (compare Luke 6:29-30). If someone sues you unjustly, what is the appropriate Christian response? How vigorous can a Christian be in insisting on his or her "rights"?
3. What about the rights of *others*? How does this passage square with the Old Testament prophets' denun-

ciation of injustice to the poor, the widowed and the oppressed? *Does it square?*

4. Consider re-examining your use of the word "rights" in questions 2 and 3 above. Consider the implications for a Christian view of what "justice" is in:
 - a) Verses 40-41
 - b) Verse 44
 - c) Verse 45b
 - d) Verse 48
5. When could Christian lawyers give this passage as "legal" advice to a client? Should they? Must they? Does the Code of Professional Responsibility place any limits on this? (If so, should this affect any of your other answers?)
6. Compare Jesus' words with those of Paul in Romans 12:17-21. Is Paul saying that love is the "best revenge"? Is this sound legal advice? ■

SEEDS SOWN AMONG THORNS

Law school is a terrific drain on your time, attention and emotions. The all-consuming nature of the enterprise has a tendency to crowd out things that, if you think about them, are more important. Charles Hummel has referred to this phenomenon as "The Tyranny of the Urgent"; that which is immediate strangles that which is important. Consider this passage from that angle.

Mark 4:1-20

1. Consider first verses 7 and 19. Do they have any bearing on your law school life? Jesus gives three different kinds of content to the "thorns." Identify and consider each separately.
2. How is the term "choke" descriptive of your experience in growing your Christian faith?
3. What do "fruitful" and "bear fruit" mean? Do they describe a *personal development* concept or an *evangelism* concept? Is verse 20 an empirical description or a command? What are the implications of your answer?

4. Do the "hard" and "rocky" grounds better describe your spiritual status quo?
5. Verses 11-12 contain one of Jesus' most disturbing recorded statements. What does it mean? (Compare Isaiah 6.) Who is responsible ("whence cometh") for a person's hardness of heart? Solutions?
6. It has been said that "the law is a jealous mistress." The prophets condemned Israel for "playing the harlot" after other gods? Do you see any connection between the metaphors?
7. Are the thorns/idols likely to change after law school? How? (Time? Money? Prestige?) Think again.
8. If you had 30 hours a day (and still allowed yourself only 4 hours sleep!), would you spend the extra 6 hours studying? How do your time priorities reflect the treasure of your heart? ■

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CHRISTIANITY

Jesus' teachings appear to contain mixed signals about whether Christian discipleship and obedience are "public" or "private." At least, it would seem that some Christians have drawn contrasting lessons from Jesus' words. Consider the following two passages

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Luke 12:8-12

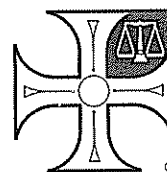
1. A good lawyer's exercise: Can the two cases be distinguished? Can the principles stated in each be harmonized? Is there a unifying principle between the two?
2. Can you think of other scriptural passages that increase or diminish the tension between these two passages? That supply a unifying principal?
3. Various Christian viewpoints satirize each other for practicing "privatized, part-time, uncommitted Christianity" or for "sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, sham religiosity." Which extreme does your Christian life more closely resemble? Is it possible to be guilty of both charges at once? Challenge each other; repeat the questions as applied to your law student fellowship
4. How, concretely, can Christians pray without "privatizing" and preach without being pompous? If you can, list practical objectives and steps for putting your answers into practice. (Then, let it be *more* than a list) ■

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN ONE EASY LESSON

This title is rather dramatic, yet it does suggest the importance of this passage to Christian lifestyle and attitudes. A helpful way to study the passage is to explore one verse at a time and concentrate on all of its implications, even the obvious ones. In many ways, this passage is a model for any Christian fellowship group. Consider applications for these verses, and commit yourselves to one another through them

Romans 12:9-21

1. Read verses 9-10. Discuss the standards of behavior within a Christian fellowship
2. Read verses 11-12. How does the law school community perceive you personally? Your group? How are you able to cope with the challenges and frustrations the life of a law student includes?
3. Consider the admonition in verse 13. What avenues have you and your group employed for service to others?
4. What is your attitude toward classmates who are hostile toward you or your beliefs? See verse 14
5. Read verse 15. Can a Christian remain detached from the emotional concerns of others?
6. Read verse 16. Who are the "lowly" among you, and what is your relationship to them? How do nonbelievers at your school relate to them? Do you battle with feelings of smugness?
7. Consider the special injunction to "take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" in verse 17.
8. Read verses 18-21 and discuss the Christian approach to "vengeance" and "victory" ■



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