

Law and Grace Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Were you more of a “color in the lines” or “color outside of the lines” child?
2. How consistent is the time you go to bed every night?

Read the following passage: Read Luke 13:10-17.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Law of Moses in the minds of Jewish men and women living in the first century. The first-century Jewish philosopher Philo wrote that a Jew “would rather endure to die ten thousand times than to do any thing in opposition to [God’s] laws and to the customs which he established.” Such devotion to the Law seemed reasonable given that it was from God himself. But in practice, the Pharisees’ radical devotion to the Law (and their traditions surrounding the Law) often blinded them to what God was saying and doing, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ.

Given our distance from that cultural context, we might be prone to think that we are immune from that sort of error. But if we define “Law” as a system for determining what is true, what is good, what is right, and how we should live, then we all have one. It’s unavoidable. And when we look to our Law to justify ourselves in the eyes of the world and of God, we become 21st-century Pharisees.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Read Matthew 23:5-7. Why do you think a legalistic mindset is so often committed to image? What are some of the ways this can emerge in the church? What might help us take off the masks that we often present to others? Is there anyone in your life that you can be vulnerable with?
2. Read Luke 18:9-14. Describe the mindset of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable. Why do you think the legalistic person often looks on others with disdain? How can we tell if we are overly critical people? How might a critical spirit impact our relationships?
3. Read Matthew 9:10-13. What does Jesus say should replace our criticism? Can we show mercy and still uphold a standard for right behavior (in our homes, in our workplaces, in our relationships, in our personal lives, etc.)? Explain. How do you define mercy?
4. The legalistic person, though committed to a pristine image, often finds a way to justify evil behavior. This emerges most dramatically in the religious leaders’ plot to kill Jesus. What can we do to fight against hypocrisy in our own lives? In what areas are you most prone to cover up your own sin?

5. The legalistic person tends to oscillate between pride and self-loathing. (Compare the attitudes in Romans 2:17ff and Romans 7:14ff.) Why do you think this is the case? Do you think you are too hard on yourself?
6. The Pharisees equated the voice of God with their system of laws and traditions, and this hindered their ability to hear God's voice in the words of Jesus. How can a legalistic mindset affect our ability to hear from God?
7. Clearly sin and obedience are very important matters in the Scriptures. How can we uphold the seriousness of these subjects without slipping into the legalistic mindset exemplified by the Pharisees?
8. How does the grace of God set us free from a legalistic mindset?
9. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Explain what it means to be saved by God's grace. What is the relationship between God's grace and our works?
10. How can you put more emphasis on God's grace in your life this week?

Pray