

It's the Law!

There are a lot of stories out there about silly laws, and here are a few that can be found on the Internet (the editor of the Scrolls makes no promises as to whether these laws are authentic or simply urban legend):

It is against the law for a monster to enter the corporate limits of Urbana, IL. (Editors note: Phew, that's a relief.)

In Gary, IN, persons are prohibited from attending a movie house or other theater and from riding a public streetcar within four hours of eating garlic. (Phew, that's even more of a relief.)

New Hampshire law forbids you to tap your feet, nod your head, or in any way keep time to the music in a tavern, restaurant or cafe. (Some feel this restriction should also apply in church.)

In Bexley, OH, Ordinance number 223 of 09/09/19 prohibits the installation and usage of slot machines in outhouses. (It's nice to see the good folks of Bexley are getting a handle on their gambling problems.)

In Nicholas County, WV, no member of the clergy is allowed to tell jokes or humorous stories from the pulpit during a church service. (No comment.)

Perhaps we like to joke about the law because many of us feel helpless when we have to deal with it (parking tickets, income tax returns, jury duty and the like). But in this week's passage, we see that God's law should not frighten us. Rather, the law points us to Jesus, and that's wonderful!

Monday – Fulfillment!

1. Begin by reading Matthew 5:17-20, where we find Jesus speaking about "the law." In a nutshell, what is Jesus saying about the law?
2. Now take a look at Psalm 119:105-106. According to these two verses, written in a parallel format, what is synonymous with "law"?
3. Please read John 1:1-17. Who is "the Word"? How does this help you understand Jesus' statement that his purpose is to fulfill God's law?

Going Deeper/Optional Reading – Psalm 119 is a love song about God's law written in several eight-verse stanzas. As an optional way of closing your time each day this week, read eight verses a day (e.g. today read Psalm 119:1-8). Every time you come to the word "law" (or one of its synonyms) keep in mind that Jesus is the fulfillment of that law. In your own words, consider praying these verses back to God.

Tuesday – Finishing What He Started

"Not enough is written or said today about finishing well." Charles Swindoll

1. Look at Matthew 5:18. What does Jesus promise at the end of the verse?
2. Finishing what you start, is a common topic in the New Testament. Compare Paul's words in Acts 20:22-24 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8. What is waiting for those who "finish the race"?
3. When God gave us his law (his word), he began something that he intends to finish. Read Matthew 5:18 once more. In what ways has God completed his law/word thus far and what remains to be completed?

Going Deeper/Optional Reading – Read and pray through Psalm 119:9-16.

Wednesday – Handling God's Word

"The law that God had truly given to Israel was, until the coming of Messiah, the most precious possession of human beings on earth." Dallas Willard – The Divine Conspiracy

1. In Matthew 5:19, Jesus makes a comment that ought to give pause to all of us who teach/explain God's word to others. Look closely at the first part of the verse. What might lead you to conclude that this responsibility applies to more than just pastors and Sunday School teachers?
2. Paul has some strong words against false teachers throughout his ministry (1 Timothy 1:3-7 and 1 Timothy 6:3-5). Read 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul's exhortation to Timothy about using God's word. What does it mean to correctly handle God's word?
3. James 3:1 is a short and powerful verse about the burden that comes with teaching. What insight does this give you about those who teach God's word? Take a moment now to pray for them.

Going Deeper/Optional Reading – Read and pray through Psalm 119:17-24.

Thursday – Righteous

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. **Isaiah 61:10**

1. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus talks about entering the "kingdom of heaven." What does he say will not qualify you for entering His kingdom?
2. Romans 3:10 tells us "There is no one righteous, not even one." Look at Romans 3:20-24. If the righteousness of the Pharisees is not good enough, how do we stand a chance to enter God's kingdom?
3. Read Isaiah 61:10 (above). If you belong to God through faith in Christ, take a moment now to give thanks that he already sees you this way. If you have not yet trusted in Christ and his righteousness, you can pray right now, asking him to bring you into his kingdom by clothing you with his righteousness. He will do it!

Going Deeper/Optional Reading – Read and pray through Psalm 119:25-32.

Friday – Murderous Thoughts

1. In Matthew 5:21-26, Jesus begins the first of several illustrations designed to take us beyond the letter of the law to the heart or true intent of the law. What relationship does Jesus make between murder and unrighteous anger? How does God feel about this destructive unrighteous kind of anger? Have you ever felt such anger (verse 22)? What impact did it have upon your relationship with God?
2. Verses 23 and 24 make a lot of sense. How does Jesus help us to see that our relationship with God (including our worship) is intimately related to our relationships with people? Is there someone who "has something against you?" Ask God to help you do your part to make things right.

Going Deeper/Optional Reading – Read and pray through Psalm 119:33-40.

Making it personal – It's probably not just the words "you fool" that are dangerous to utter. Is there anything you need to change about your way of speaking?

For the Weekend: Continue reading through Psalm 119, eight verses a day. You might want to consider doing that for several weeks to come.