



Studying ... Law?

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Its hard work but rewarding!

Studying law is challenging and hard work but it is not without its rewards. It may mean spending more time in the library than your friends do, missing out on nights out, etc. ... but wouldn't you rather be studying the pursuit of justice and order and reflecting upon the clash of worldviews underpinning laws and legal philosophies ...? Perhaps not ...? I often meet students who feel somewhat disillusioned with their studies. They tell me that 'law is boring' and sometimes I have to agree ... we're not all made with minds that enjoy the intricate details of tax law, although some (believe it or not) are!

More often than not, however, this disillusionment stems from the challenge of integrating the Christian faith with law. This is where the rubber hits the road. Does the study of law really matter to God? What does God think about the area of law I'm studying? Can I really be a Christian and a lawyer? These are very important questions and unless we have clear answers to them we are likely to become disillusioned and confused. Disillusioned and confused students tend to become disillusioned and confused lawyers, struggling to find God's will in their work. The *Lawyers' Christian Fellowship* (LCF) exists to help law students (and young lawyers) find answers to these key questions. We aim to equip law students and help them to understand what they are studying from a Christian perspective and to prepare for practise as a *Christian* lawyer. You can find some resources to help you to do exactly that on our website: www.lawcf.org.

I mentioned rewards. Non-Christians tend to think of the rewards of studying law in terms of the

money, power and influence associated with a career in law. Yes, many legal jobs do pay well (but you do have to earn your money). For the Christian, however, the real reward is the privilege of serving God with our legal skills and abilities. It is the joy of doing justice with compassion and the honour of seeking the advancement of his Kingdom.

Truth and Justice

Justice matters to God. It is central to his plans for the Kingdom of God. He hears the cry of the oppressed and sets them free (Exodus 2:24–25). God gave the Israelites righteous laws to provide a measure of justice in a fallen world, facilitating mankind to live in right relationship with one another, thereby revealing His character of justice (Deuteronomy 4:5–8). He raises up prophets like Amos to appeal to the people of his day to seek good and not evil and to establish and maintain justice in the courts (Amos 5:15). He instructs mankind to follow justice and justice alone (Deuteronomy 16:20).

Since lawyers today have such a bad public image, the notion of a Christian lawyer may seem rather implausible to some. If this is you, you might be asking questions, such as:

Do lawyers have to lie or be 'economical with the truth'?

Can a Christian represent someone they believe to be guilty?

These are good questions to ask, although they are not the easiest to answer in a few short paragraphs. But here goes...

First, no, lawyers do not have to lie. The best advocates are truthful advocates. Lawyers in the UK have to keep to a regulated and strict Code of Conduct that I'm pleased to say strongly adheres to Christian principles of truth and integrity. Modern textbooks on advocacy actually teach budding barristers to be 'honest guides'.

Second, no, lawyers do not have to be economical with the truth, but they do have to argue their case and in doing so will seek to highlight the positive – good facts – and explain or avoid the negative – bad facts. But this is not the end of the story since there are two lawyers on

opposing sides arguing in this way (typically one lawyer's bad points are his opponent's good points) and there is a judge (and in criminal cases a jury) who hears all the evidence and makes a ruling or decision in light of the evidence and the lawyers' arguments (which are based on the evidence the judge has heard). A lawyer only plays a part in the justice process. He does not decide where the blame lies. God has appointed judges, juries and magistrates to do this (Romans 13:1-7).

Finally, can a Christian represent someone they believe to be guilty? This question, although well-intentioned, is ill-conceived. It is based on a misunderstanding of the judicial process. Lawyers, believe it or not, unlike God, do not know all things. They have access to all the evidence and can form an opinion and advise their client accordingly but ultimately it is not their opinion that counts; lawyers are not judges. Moreover, if a lawyer does not do his job to the best of his abilities, perhaps because he doubts his client's innocence, he unbalances the judicial process, handicapping the judge, and does not put forward his client's case, which may, when argued properly, be seen to be true.

In a criminal law context, when a client admits his guilt to his lawyer but chooses to plead not guilty, things are a bit more tricky. Sometimes people admit their guilt in this way to protect someone else – one cannot equate their admission with certainty of guilt. In this situation a lawyer must (in accordance with the Code of Conduct) test the evidence against his client, its quality and reliability, but cannot assert his client's innocence, e.g. he wasn't there, since this is not necessarily true. This testing of the evidence is important so that justice is seen to be done and that individuals are not found guilty unless there is sufficient evidence to establish their guilt.

Okay ... that's probably enough from me. It's been quite a long time since my undergraduate law days at the University of Nottingham, so I asked some recent law graduates and undergraduates to comment on life as a Christian law student. Here's what they had to say.

What challenges does a Christian law student face?

'Being surrounded by fellow students who are completely driven by money and prestige, it is easy to slip into that worldly mindset. Lecturers teaching that law is all about the money and that it's stupid saying, "I want to help people". Tough issues relating to morality. Can we say something is "morally" wrong or just "legally" wrong...? Often lecturers only really argue the latter.'

'Dealing with a secular student culture is something with which every Christian student must wrestle; however, particularly in degrees with a reputation for "working hard and playing harder" there can be greater challenges. Also while it is fun to joke about the legal profession being the butt of all jokes about corruption and evilness, there is a very real ingrained belief that it is a paradox to be a *Christian* lawyer....'

'Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul whilst trying to cram the law into your mind!'

What are the toughest subjects for a Christian law student to study?

'Anything involving ethical issues, e.g. medical law – abortion, euthanasia, etc. The hardest subject but the best subject to witness in for me was legal theory. Issues of legal positivism versus natural law and more recent postmodern influences like Jacques Derrida's stuff on deconstruction, etc. was hard because it was taught in such a biased way, but I loved it!'

'Family Law is a very socially aware legal subject as the cases are all to do with real peoples' struggles. However, whenever dealing with issues that clash with Biblical teaching and morals (e.g. divorce, civil partnerships, cohabitation) it can be difficult to be the one single person in a tutorial who thinks that the law isn't right.'

'I have been finding subjects such as company law tough simply because they are very dry.'

How did you apply your faith to what you were studying? What resources and materials did you use?

'Applying my faith was relatively easy in the more theory/ethical based subjects and before approaching any essay question I would always

ask, what does the Bible say on this issue...? If there was clear Biblical teaching on the area then writing the essay was easy because I knew what was right, I just had to work out how I could convince the marker! Applying faith to areas like intellectual property was more of a challenge!

'Useful resources for me: all the LCF stuff (obviously!) and knowing Christian lawyers/LCF staff to ask questions of. Also, some links on discovery.org were useful. And some of the writings by C.S. Lewis, e.g. *Mere Christianity* (esp. chapters 1–5) and *The Abolition of Man*.'

'Excellent books to read to get a Christian perspective on the legal profession and study are David McIlroy's *Biblical View of Law and Justice*, and also Paul Beaumont's *Christian Perspectives on Law Reform*. There are also good talks available online from www.bethinking.org about the use of law in defending our Christian liberties while at University, something which I have found very useful being on the front lines in Edinburgh.'

How did you find witnessing to non-Christian law students, in lectures, tutorials, at the library, etc.?

'I did not witness in the law school anywhere near as much as I should have or could have done. I would often just go in, get taught and leave! But I would often make comments in seminars (or sometimes in lectures) from a Christian viewpoint that other students would take up with me afterwards.'

'It's always too easy to talk about anything but Jesus. Rather than simply throwing about Jesus' name I have always sought to build relationships where people can see the effect Christ has in my life everyday and as salt and light engaging people where they're at. It can be very challenging to stand up and defend Christian positions, particularly in tutorials when some very interesting debates can get started. However, I've always found it's best not to hide your faith as people respect you more if you stand up for your beliefs – even if they completely disagree! Whatever we do we must always remember to do it gently and with love, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide our words...'

What advice would you give to a Christian

studying law?

'Learn what the Bible teaches about law, justice, society, morality, etc. Find other Christians in your law school. Join the LCF! Be thinking about how you can best use your law degree for God.'

'Don't let the law take precedent over God and trust Him every step of the way.'

Anything else you want to add...?

'Have I mentioned the LCF?! Join your local LCF, or pray and ask the Lord if you're the person who can take the initiative to start one. I had only been studying law for two weeks when I was asked to lead LCF in Edinburgh and it's been a wonderful experience these last two years. He has surprising plans and is able to work through you, if only you'll let him!'

Believe it or not, none of these students were bribed to plug the LCF! If you'd like to find out more about the LCF, please get stuck into the student pages of our website: www.lawcf.org, sign up to our podcast, etc. and don't hesitate to get in contact by email: howard@lawcf.org.

Wishing you God's blessings in your legal studies!

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