

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

One of the reasons that I appreciate this column is that it continually reminds me of the importance of balancing law and gospel as a Christian parent. I don't need much encouragement when it comes to laying down the law. I have that part of parenting down pretty well. Yet I continually search for ways to reflect God's grace in my parenting with the same skill. Our two articles this month give solid recommendations on how to do just that.

—Nicole Balza

## HOW DO WE RESIST MAKING OUR PARENTING LAW-BASED?

**WHAT PURPOSES** does the law serve? Luther's catechism says that the chief purpose of the law is to show our sin, exposing our need for Jesus. The law is a mirror. Because of the Holy Spirit, we can see our sin, turn away from it, and turn to Jesus.

I know that I am often tempted to use the law for much more than that. When I get emotional about something my children did or said that was wrong, I want to throw the law in their faces so they feel badly and stay in that place even after they have confessed and turned to Jesus for forgiveness.

I've learned that law produces guilt and guilt produces behavior modifications. I know my children well enough to push those guilt buttons, and they will immediately change their behavior. And while that looks great on the outside, it doesn't always get to the heart of the matter. And when we don't get to the heart of the matter, the behavior modifications are short-lived. I become the face of the law. When I'm the face of the law, it works only when I am present.

So what options do we have as parents?

- 1. Use the law for its chief purpose**—to show them their sin. Now that my children are older, I often don't have to show them their sin. They've already applied the law. They've already turned to Jesus. Instead of throwing it back in their faces, I get to step back and watch grace unfold.
- 2. Be the giver of grace.** Whether or not I am the one to show the law, I want to shower my children with grace, to remind them that they are so dearly loved. One of my favorite reminders is that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. You are perfectly loved by God.

- 3. Model giving grace to ourselves.** Don't live in guilt. Satan is known for using something from God and then twisting it. Satan takes guilt (which is supposed to turn us to our Savior in repentance) and chains us to it. Think about your frame of mind when you feel guilty. You are ineffective, exhausted, and not the person/parent God called you to be. When you feel guilty, use the law and ask yourself, "Am I sinning?" If the answer is yes, then turn away from that sin and turn to Jesus. But often you feel guilty for things that aren't wrong. You believe the lies Satan whispers in your ears and wallow in that guilt.

What does it look like for you to have grace-based parenting? Keep directing your children to follow Jesus—the one thing needed. He's the one who loves our children and us perfectly and unconditionally.



Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are currently parenting their two youngest children and navigating their change of roles as their three adult children are now living on their own.


### HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

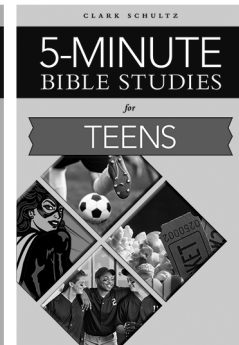
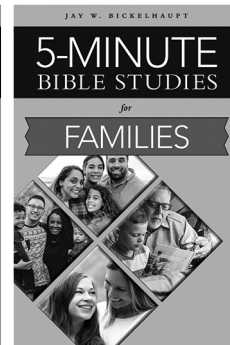
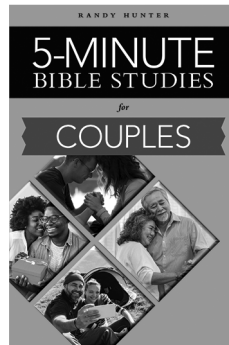
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# AN ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ROB GUENTHER

Could you spare five minutes a day? (I know you can.) Then check out these books to find comfort and motive in the gospel and to help your kids do the same.

- *5-Minute Bible Studies: For Couples*
- *5-Minute Bible Studies: For Families*
- *5-Minute Bible Studies: For Teens*

VISIT  [nph.net](http://nph.net) to learn more and order.



“HOW DO WE resist making our parenting law-based?” There are two ways of looking at the question.

## Option 1

As a dad, I have a lot to feel guilty about. I snapped at my son, I reacted in anger at the disrespect, and I ignored the boy who needed my attention. I’m far from a perfect parent. I know it. God knows it. So the law can sometimes drive me: Do better. Be better. Be more patient. Be more present. Be a better dad.

How do we parents resist being driven by the law? We find peace at the foot of the cross. We know we’ve messed up as parents. But we also know that we’re forgiven by all that Jesus has done. He took away all sin, including our failures as parents.

But there’s another way of looking at the question.

## Option 2

The law gets results. “Do what I say or else (lose your toy, your video games, your phone)” can get my kids to act. It gets results.

But does it really get the results that we want? Threats might get the chore or the homework done, but is that really all we’re after? Our goal as parents isn’t just controlled behavior but changed hearts and maturity of faith and life. The law can’t do that.

I can force my kids into submission with threats of the law, but I would be raising kids who will behave only as long as the threat hangs over their heads. If they think I’m not looking or they can get away with it, they’ll rebel.

By using the gospel, I can teach my kids to do the right thing out of love for their Savior. Then they

will be subservient to him, eager to live for him in thanksgiving.

So . . . how do we resist making our parenting law-based?

## A rich devotional life answers both questions.

We, and our kids, *still* need the law to show us where we fail, teach that rebellion against God is not okay, and drive us back to the cross. We, and our kids, *always* need the gospel to show us how Jesus was perfect in our place and makes us perfect in God’s sight, which motivates and empowers us to live for God in thanks.

We find both law and gospel in the Word. So set aside time for personal devotions. Encourage your reading kids to do the same. Set aside time for family devotions. Feel the sting of the law. Then rejoice in the peace the gospel brings.

No parents give grace better than the ones who know that they desperately need it themselves and who know that they have it in Christ. The gospel, not the law, makes us joyful and patient parents and makes godly kids for this life and eternity.



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