

2025 Q4 Joshua Lesson 4

The Conflict Behind All Conflicts

by Lori Atkins

INTRODUCTION

Our lesson this week honestly would have been a good lesson, but we are probably not going to get to it.

As Tim mentioned last week, a bunch of us just got back from the AACC – the American Association of Christian Counselors – world conference in Nashville, and it was as invigorating and inspiring and exhausting as ever and I loved being there. Some days it felt like I had personally spoken to all ~7,500 attendees myself...and as usual we were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic reception, the positive feedback, the shock and awe at our willingness and ability to give, give, give, and the immense appreciation for this ministry, for this message and picture of God, and for our (YOUR) generosity...so thank you from the bottom of my heart, I won't be able to adequately convey the gratitude and the impact and the temporal and eternal differences your support of this ministry is making in sooooo many people's lives.

Tim had a big pre-conference session focused on non-pharmaceutical treatments for depression, teaming up with Honey Lake Clinic on that one. Then he did an Aging Brain workshop that had 200 or so folks registered, but there were over 300 people stuffed in the room standing along the walls and even sitting in the aisles. He also participated in several interviews and podcast events, and last but not least, he was given a very prestigious award; The 2025 Frank Minirth Award for Excellence in Christian Psychiatry and Behavioral Health by the American Association of Christian Counselors. This award recognizes Dr. Jennings' dedication to providing Christ-centered care in the field of psychiatry and behavioral health. Also, a prominent Bible study platform expressed some interest in discussing possibly adding some of our digital materials to their software which could then expand our reach and exposure to a large audience of their subscribers...so please keep that in your prayers for God's will to be done with that potential opportunity.

SABBATH

So let me tell you why and what I believe should take priority over the lesson quarterly this week and you can let me know if you agree.

I had an encounter at the AACC conference that affected me deeply, kind of shook me, sobered me, inspired me, and changed me, which is something remarkable when you are literally talking and interacting with hundreds of strangers and spending just a few seconds maybe minutes with each one.

As platinum AACC sponsors, we had booths in two locations – our smaller 10-foot booth sits right outside the main ballroom where plenary sessions are held and it gets tons of traffic, because it's where every attendee has to pass going to and from classes, meetings, etc.

Our larger 20-foot booth was downstairs in the giant exhibit hall with over 200 other booths, and it's where folks come to browse/shop/collect goodies during non-class/meeting hours.

So, I was helping to man the larger exhibit hall booth during the "off" hours when class/meetings were in session, which meant there were hardly any folks wandering the exhibit hall. There were only two of us manning the booth and this is the down time when we typically re-stock the materials on the table, break down empty boxes, catch up on messages, and such. I saw a couple of guys out of the corner of my eye looking at magazines on the far end of the tables. When I looked up again, the two young boys, who were obviously brothers, had moved down and were standing in front of me holding this magazine – I found out later they are both home schooled and junior/senior high school ages. They looked a little nervous when I greeted them, but the older one said, "I'm going to take this back to my room and read it tonight, but can you get tell me real quick and concise...what is 'The Lie'?" Well, I took a deep breath and immediately, simultaneously, these thoughts flashed through my mind:

Oh, man...I realllllly wish you could speak to the author

Lord, help me

I'm soooo glad you didn't you didn't bring me one of beasts of Revelation magazines!

Spoiler alert...after I answered his question about what the lie is, he then asked me what happens to the wicked in the end...and finished with well then why did Jesus have to die, so he successfully covered the doctrinal differences trifecta in one easy encounter.

Have you ever been asked these questions?

Would you have known how to answer and what would you have said?

How many of you, like me, have thought I KNOW this stuff, I have heard it on repeat in class, I have read and studied it for myself, yet when I'm asked questions about these healing remedy concepts – especially tough, pointed questions, I freeze up and feel like I fail to explain things like I want to or in a clear, concise way so that folks who are unfamiliar with our ministry can understand or at least rouses some intrigue/curiosity?

Does anyone else here struggle with that? I know some of you do because we've talked about it, and we used to have a monthly get together to discuss just such topics and I enjoyed it and believe most folks found the time spent to be valuable. I know that gathering has been on an extended hiatus, but once we get through the holidays our plan is to start meeting again on the third weekend of the month for potluck, fellowship, and afternoon study – either at my house or here at the building or somewhere else, we will figure out the time and place and start our third Saturday festivities back up again.

So, what would you say?

How would you answer the curious young man asking "What is The Lie"?

I gave him the most clear, concise answer I could and said I believe the lie that has infected the vast majority of Christianity (as well as all other major religions) is that God's laws and government function just like human laws and governments.

Do you think that explanation can stand on its own?

Had you ever heard anything remotely resembling this concept prior to finding this class?

I didn't...I don't remember hearing *anything* about God's law other than it was carved on tablets of stone and breaking any of them was no bueno. So even though we've clearly and accurately defined what the lie is, some follow-up explanation is needed. I started by contrasting the two types of laws.

What are some simple ways to explain/define/describe imposed law along with some examples?

I have to tell you, I firmly believe that some of the most valuable and effective insights I have learned in this class are the brilliant analogies and metaphors that help make complex theological (or physiological or psychological) concepts easy to understand and digestible and can provide ah-ha/lightbulb moments to any and all knowledge levels.

The most effective ways I've found are to either define US laws in layman's terms, specifically how the US government creates/enacts laws and the School House Rock cartoon "I'm Just a Bill" provides the perfect script:

I'm just a bill, Yes, I'm only a bill
And I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill.
Well, it's a long, long journey To the capital city.
It's a long, long wait While I'm sitting in committee,
But I know I'll be a law someday
At least I hope and pray that I will,
But today I am still just a bill.

I'm just a bill, Yes, I'm only a bill,
And if they vote for me on Capitol Hill,
Well, then I'm off to the White House
Where I'll wait in a line
With a lot of other bills
For the President to sign.
And if he signs me, then I'll be a law.
How I hope and pray that he will,
But today I am still just a bill.

...or ask an engaging question to the listener like...when you hear the word law, what comes to mind first – something passed by congress and signed by the president or the law of gravity/laws of physics?

This can give you an idea of the person's default frame of reference.

So hit me with some descriptions, attributes, and examples of imposed law.

- Enacted purposely, externally
- Require monitoring/auditing/policing for violations
- No inherent consequences for violations – they require arbitrary (inconsistent) penalties/punishment to be meted out by some external authority
- Speed limits, taxes, jaywalking, etc.

Okay, now let's compare those with design laws...what are some good contrasting examples of design law?

- Law of gravity (no gravity police required)
- Laws of physics
- Laws of health
- Law of respiration – in order to live you must breathe
- Law of liberty, giving, restoration, worship, exertion

Our laws are made-up rules that require the infliction of punishment. But God is the Creator, the Builder of reality, and His laws are the protocols upon which reality is constructed to operate. God's laws are the functional principles upon which all things exist and which sustain all things. Life, health, and happiness are possible only when we are in harmony with the laws our Creator built life to function upon. These include the laws of physics, gravity, health, and the moral laws—the laws that govern the healthy operations of our hearts, minds, and relationships. Life exists, thrives, and grows only when it is in harmony with these protocols. Just as pouring water into an engine that is designed to run on gasoline breaks the design parameters by placing the engine out of harmony with the laws of physics and, therefore, causes it to stop functioning, so also breaking God's laws for life causes us to suffer, break down, and die.

God's laws, how things work, the protocols of life, originate in His character of love.

When God spoke the universe into existence, He designed it to operate in harmony with Himself. And God is love (1 John 4:16). Thus, the greatest of all God's laws is the law of love (Matthew 22:37–39). God's law of love is not restricted to compassion or emotional tenderness; it is a design principle upon which life is constructed to function. It is a living law. It is the principle of giving, of othercenteredness; it is “not self-seeking” (1 Corinthians 13:5); it is other-centered, beneficent, selfless: This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers and sisters! (1 John 3:16 GNT).

Obviously, no Christian wants to believe that they believe a lie and that they are taking to the world a false gospel that harms people. But Jesus Himself told us that this would, indeed, be the state of some who call themselves Christian:

- Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform

many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:21–23).

These “Christians” are active in doing what they think is “gospel work,” but our Savior calls them “evildoers.” Why? Because they don’t know the real Jesus, His character of love, His methods, and how His kingdom truly functions. Paul warned that those claiming faith in God would be in this very state at the end of time:

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

Paul is not describing the godless, the atheist, or the agnostic. He is describing those with “a form of godliness,” which can be referring only to people who self-identify as Christians— those who claim God-likeness. He tells us that just before the second coming of Jesus, there will be a form of Christian religion that is powerless to change hearts, minds, and characters to be like Jesus.

And, sadly, that is exactly what we find today. Multiple studies document that within Christian homes, the rates of spousal and child abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, pornography use, and teen pregnancy are no different than those in non-Christian homes. Truly a form of godliness with no power!

But how can this be? Shouldn’t those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior, who call themselves Christian, abuse their families far less than people who have not accepted Jesus?

Why is this happening within the church? Because there is a counterfeit Christianity, one that is built upon a single lie. And just as a counterfeit dollar bill has no buying power, counterfeit Christianity has no saving, healing, transforming power—a form of godliness without power!

How does God’s law actually function? How one answers this question determines how one understands God and His character, methods, and government. It determines whether we are worshiping the Creator who built reality—or whether we are worshiping a creature, a being we call God but whose abilities, methods, character, and government are nothing more than what a creature can establish (are you, like me, increasingly astonished at how foundational our view of how God’s law functions truly is?)

I had to use the thesaurus to try to help describe its importance with words like critical, vital, crucial, indispensable, requisite...we call it a law lens because it colors/affects/powers/shapes **everything**, both the obviously spiritual and the seemingly non-spiritual.

And lest you’re not paying attention, it’s becoming more and more clear that it is all spiritual. I was kind of struck during Tim’s last interview with Advent Media Connect, the one that was more like an ambush, when he told the folks with penal theologies that he wouldn’t/couldn’t argue with them or try

to change their minds, because penal substitution, retributive justice, and punishment of rule breakers is the only logical rational conclusion for anyone who believes God's law is imposed and functions like human/Roman law.

Unless/until they changed their foundational beliefs on the nature of God's laws and how they function, then embracing a different theology wasn't even possible).

This is Satan's goal, to replace the truth about God in the hearts and minds of intelligent beings with a counterfeit god, whether Satan himself or any idol of worship who possesses and practices the methods of Satan (what might an idol of worship who possess and practices the methods of Satan look like? A denomination or church that preaches "every sin must meet its punishment" from the pulpit? What about an organization with a long history and focus on religious liberty that closes their places of worship and coerces its members, employees, students to take an experimental treatment with no long term safety data?)

If we conclude that God's law functions no differently than human law—with made-up rules— then we automatically conclude that God, in order to be just, must use His power to inflict punishment for rule-breaking. Our understanding of who God is, His character, His methods, His principles, His government, His trustworthiness, the sin problem, and God's solution for it (the plan of salvation) is corrupted.

By getting people to believe that God's law functions like human law, Satan argues, There is nothing wrong with sin—it doesn't actually cause anyone harm; the problem is with God, who will use His power to kill you because you sin by breaking His made-up rules. God is the actual source of harm. If we could only do something to God, propitiate His anger and wrath, pay Him with something, then we could live forever in sin because sin doesn't harm. God harms you for it. If we believe that God's law functions like human law, then we teach that sin is a legal problem, one of breaking rules, and that justice requires the infliction of punishment by the rule-giver. In this legal way of seeing things, God is presented as the source of death, which He is required "by law" to inflict upon rule-breakers as punishment for sin.

This human-law view makes God the one from whom we must be protected—His wrath must be propitiated, His anger assuaged, His "just" punishment taken—if not by the sinner, then by something or someone else.

It is also falsely taught that if God doesn't use His power to inflict punishment for sin, then there is no justice. This imposed-law system misrepresents God's justice to be the appropriate infliction of punishment, which results in the lie that someone must be punished for our sin-crimes, and that Jesus came to take our place in order to be punished by God for those sins.

The lie that God's law functions like human law leads to the lie that God cannot freely pardon, cannot forgive sin outright, because the law demands sin be punished through the external infliction of pain and death. But this type of justice is a worldly, earthly, sinful, corrupt, human-devised justice.

This type of justice is artificial, counterfeit, fake, made-up, arbitrary, mythical, unreal, and it is all based on the lie that God's law functions no differently than human law. This type of law and justice does not represent the law and justice of God.

So, after my brief exposition explaining the fundamental differences between imposed laws and design laws, any guesses what the young man's next question was?

Well, if there's no punishment for sin, does everyone get saved?
What happens to the wicked at the end?

My answer was: Raised in the third resurrection with the same character, thoughts, actions...gather implements of war...ignore the open gates of the new Jerusalem...His presence of unveiled truth and love causes them immense pain, agony, torture, anguish and because they are so settled into the lie about who and what God is that they would rather surrender their lives and their eternal existence than to be in His presence...and He grants them their choice, lets them go to reap what they have sown, and separates them from Himself the source of life.

Last but not least, how do you answer when someone asks you why did Jesus have to die?

I typically answer that question with a question, why did Jesus have to live?
Why did he come here in the first place?
What was his mission?

What do the scriptures tell us about why he was here?

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8

Okay, what is the devil's work? To misrepresent God, initially by lies (war in heaven), but then by co-opting mankind, who was created in God's image, to reveal God's character (in Eden), and to then replace God's law of love with Satan's law of selfishness (fear/survival of the fittest) in the heart of man. Christ took our infirmity, our sinful condition upon Himself in order to heal, fix, and resolve the sin problem. He did this by perfectly restoring God's character of love back into the species human. Remember, Christ was a unique being/birth in all of history – born of a sinful mother but His father was the Holy Spirit...therefore, these two principles – self-sacrificing love and fear/selfishness/survival warred it out in the person of Jesus Christ.

In His human brain, Christ lived God's law of love perfectly, purging the death-causing principle from his humanity and revealing the true character of God that Adam was created to reveal. Thus, He destroyed the devil's work, and in so doing became the second Adam and will reign for all eternity as the head of the human species.

By His death Christ destroys him who holds the power of death, that is the devil. – Heb 2:14

What is the devil's power of death? I know you know this one!

This is life eternal that they might know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. – John 17:3

If eternal life is knowing God, then eternal death is NOT knowing God.

What then is Satan's power of death? The lies he tells about God that keep us from knowing Him.

What destroys lies about God? The truth about God as revealed by Jesus, thus it is the Good News about God, as revealed by Christ, that destroys the devil's power of death. This is why He says in John 17:4,

I have finished the work you gave me to do...I have made you known.

The third reason Jesus had to live and die:

Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. – 2 Tim 1:10

How did Jesus' death destroy death?

The law of love is the law of life, the law upon which all life in the universe was designed to operate.

Death comes as the natural result of breaking the law of love, just like death comes as the natural result of breaking the law of respiration by tying a plastic bag over your head. Christ destroyed death by perfectly restoring the law of love, the basis for life, into mankind and overcoming the inherent infection of fear and selfishness (survival of the fittest).

He did this when, in His humanity, He chose to surrender His life in love rather than use His power to save Himself. Thus, in Christ, love overcame the infection of selfishness.

"The law of the Lord is Perfect Reviving the Soul" i.e. the kingdom of Love, emanating from the God of Love is Life and destroys death.