



Galatians 5:1-6

- 1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**
- 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.**
- 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.**
- 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.**
- 5 For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.**
- 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

Special Music: “New Christian Song” Nathan Wagner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InjD9oBUc78>

Contrary to popular belief and tradition, Abner Doubleday of Cooperstown, NY, did not invent baseball. There is very little evidence and no hard evidence that he had anything to do with the creation of what many still consider as “The national pastime.” What we do know is that in 1837 William Wheaton from the New York Baseball Club, created a set of rules for the game that best resembles modern baseball.

And while rules were modified, added, or removed in the ensuing years, no new rule affected the game as much as the contradictory and hotly debated Designated Hitter rule that was added to the American League in 1973. This rule allows for a hitter to bat in place of the pitcher in the lineup. The rule had been suggested by Connie Mack, the manager of the Philadelphia Athletics, as early as 1906. Over the years, the Designated Hitter rule was brought up numerous times until it finally was added to the American League rule book in 1973. While the American League continues to use this rule, it was not used in the National League until 2020 and has not yet been made a permanent rule in the National League

The rationale behind the rule was that pitchers were signed for their prowess at pitching more than anything else. Most were not adept at fielding the ball and very few were a threat when it came to batting. Babe Ruth, who started his career as a pitcher, and a few others over the years have been exceptions to this

standard. So, the Designated Hitter rule was put into place to balance the scale when it came to having pitchers in the batting lineup.

During the World Series before 2020, the Designated Hitter rule only applied to games played in stadiums associated with American League teams and was not used in stadiums associated with National League teams.

New rules are often brought into play to enhance the excitement of the game with the ultimate goal of bigger crowds, which translates into higher box office receipts. This reasoning is applied in many major sports.

The penalty kick in soccer implemented in 1891

The 24 second shot clock added to basketball in 1954

The forward pass rule for football implemented in 1910

The forward passing rules for hockey added in 1927

The limits of 6 players on a team and the 3 touch rule, both implemented in volleyball after WW1

These rules were basically implemented for two reasons.

- 1. The protection of the players**
- 2. To add a new level of excitement to the game. (After all, sporting events are often considered entertainment).**

But a lot of thought goes into adding, removing, or changing rules and those rules need to be agreed upon by all the participants for them to have the anticipated effect. These particular rules are considered game changers for the designated sports. For instance, the 24 second shot clock in basketball actually increased the average scores of the teams involved and that created greater excitement. In 1954, the average score for an NBA team per game was 79.5. Boy, don't you love sports statistics. The year after the implementation of the shot clock, the average was 93.1 and within three years, every team in the NBA was scoring over 100 points per game, which translated into huge increases in box office receipts.

That is why certain rules are considered to be game changers. They can force us to re-examine our strategies and alignments. They can refocus our vision. They can push us to be and do better. They can even force us to look inside ourselves and tweak our internal compasses to accommodate those rules. Sometimes, we are just unable to come to grips with new rules and sometimes we engage them at a level that propels us to become much better versions of ourselves.

When we look at an overview of history with regard to Judaism, we are all familiar with the 10 commandments. But, in truth, out of these commandments, these rules for living that promote the worship of God and also define how we are to treat our neighbors, there came into being 613 commandments. These rules were

to help define and enforce the original ten. One of those commandments was circumcision, which just happens to be the one that Paul talks about in our passage today. And this particular law regarding circumcision was the source of a great deal of spiteful argument and division because of the addition of the gentiles to the stew pot of Christianity. Many of the Jewish Christian leaders felt that it was necessary for gentile men to be circumcised in order to become Christians and be considered children of God.

Paul is trying to get across to both the Jews and the Gentiles that they need to change their stinkn' thinkin'. Christ brought a new rule to the game. He didn't change the old rules. He added a rule that was a game changer. And that rule is the rule of GRACE.

Last week we talked about "Eye for an Eye." Before Christ arrived to teach the world differently, the people of this planet lived in a container forged in patterns generated by the "Eye for an Eye" philosophy. That philosophy is still so very present today, in spite of everything that Christ said to the contrary. The concept of Yin/Yang, Karma and moral balance have been taught for centuries, and it is still an accepted tenet in many societies today. The belief that that, for every good thing that happens, something bad has to happen to keep the balance, is a way to teach our brains that there are reasons that bad things and good things happen. The idea that someone who commits an evil act will receive something

evil back in return as a punishment, is often believed to be an attempt by the universe to bring balance, as if the universe is alive, conscious and in control. It is an attempt by us to lay the justification brought about by right and wrong actions onto an object of our choosing, an idol, a false God, worship of a thing. It pleases us to think that Karma is at work and the wrong will be righted in order to keep the universe in balance. We find comfort in thinking that the universe operates according to certain rules and that those rules apply to human behavior as well.

But we as Christians should understand, that is not the way the Kingdom of God works. The physical universe is a very small part of the Kingdom of God. It is our perspective of being tiny creatures on a small world, in a given solar system placed at the edge of a galaxy among millions of other galaxies that encourages that way of thinking. We have absolutely no way to grasp the extent of the Kingdom of God, especially knowing that we can't even grasp the dimensions of a universe created inside of that Kingdom.

We can't and never will understand all the physical laws that govern the universe that God created as a platform for our development. We can't even define those laws we do know about without constantly revisiting them and rewriting them to better match our understanding of them. In those cases, the rules don't change, just our understanding of the rules. Our belief that we can change those laws if

we better understand them is just a fabrication of our own minds in a feeble attempt to control our universe.

But the universe is not ours to control. God has given it to us to manage but that does not mean we were ever meant to control it. We have to work within the laws of the universe, question our own understanding of those laws and re-evaluate those laws as well as our interaction with those laws so that we can better manage this environment that God has blessed us with.

In order to do that, we have to change the way we think and delete the “eye for an eye” and the justification for revenge attitudes from our lives. We have to strive to work within the confines of the law and see the law as a freeing of the spirit rather than an imprisonment of the soul. God tells us that our thinking is warped as we try to rationalize the question of good vrs. evil through an “eye for an eye” attitude. Jesus helps steer our thinking regarding this by saying in:

Matthew 5:45

45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

In other words, the bounty granted to us as children of our loving God is not limited to just the righteous Neither are the tribulations limited to just the

unrighteous. The sun shines on both. The rain falls on the land of the worshipper of God as well as those who reject God. The landslide that destroys a town does not base its actions on being righteous or unrighteous. The flood that comes will wash out the land of both the believer and the non-believer. In a pandemic, sickness and death is not limited to non-believers. None of that is retribution from God.

When my eldest son was born, he was born with a Beta Strep virus. He was a very sick baby. The pediatric specialist that was called in to help him was very blunt. He told us that we needed to be prepared for the loss of our son because, even though they were going to pump his tiny body full of anti-biotics, the odds for his survival were minimal. He told us that if the disease did not kill our son, the antibiotics probably would. Since my wife also had Beta Strep, they quarantined her in ICU. Wally was quarantined in pediatric ICU. I practically lived at the hospital, shuffling between the two ICUs, constantly having to wash and re-gown. They both survived and we truly felt blessed that God had shown to such favor on us. We truly felt blessed.

I mentioned this story to a friend, and he became agitated with me. But he patiently explained why he was agitated with a question, which led to a great deal of thought and prayer on my part. You see, he and his wife had gone through a similar experience, only the child had not survived. His question to me was

simple. If I felt so very blessed by the survival of my son, did that mean that my friend was cursed because his child did not survive? Food for thought if you have a mind geared towards a God given to blessings and curses based on human behavior.

But don't we all think that way occasionally? If we are having a really bad day, don't we sometimes question ourselves by asking what we might have done to upset God? I mean, most of us are not like Job. We aren't so assured of our actions and our faith that when something bad happens, we don't question ourselves. We think that because we have earthly laws that tell us that if we do something we shouldn't, then we will be punished. We want to translate that action/reaction into how God treats us. Which is why we struggle so much with grace.

It's like showing up to pay a parking ticket, only to be told that someone else has already paid it for us. We haven't done anything to deserve having our ticket paid. We firmly believe that, even if we feel the ticket was unjust, we are probably going to have to pay the ticket. It's the way the law works. So, when someone steps in to take the burden from us, it is unexpected and so very hard to believe. I mean, what stranger would go around paying other peoples parking tickets?

Well, that's just how Jesus works. Jesus knows that we are guilty, that we have sinned, that we deserve to be punished. Just like the thief on the cross understood that he was being justly punished and that it was totally unjust that Jesus, innocent and pure, was being punished. We understand that when we must stand before God in judgement. We understand that we truly deserve any punishment that we receive from God. We are born into iniquity. We are sinful creatures by our very nature. We fail God every day in so many ways. And standing there before the throne of God, we are expecting His judgement and punishment. But, before that sentence is passed and carried out, Jesus speaks up and says in a clear voice, "This is my brother or sister who believes in me. I have already paid the debt. I have covered the cost of the ticket. I went to the cross to clear up any outstanding balance. I paid of this debt with my blood. There is no condemnation because the guilt has been washed away."

We don't deserve that. We deserve to be punished. But God loves us so very much that He sent His son who willingly died for our transgressions so that we can know the eternal joy of being in the presence of the creator of the universe. It's a game changer. It is a new rule created to allow us embrace our God even though we don't deserve it. It is grace. Grace that we can never truly grasp completely but is given to us freely. It's the 24 second shot rule. It's the forward pass rule. It's the Designated Hitter Rule. It's the "God loves me so much that He sent His son to die for me" rule.

But we have to embrace the rule. Just like the American League embraced the Designator Hitter rule. The rule doesn't come into play if we don't embrace it. We can choose to be like the National League did for so many years and continue to think "Eye for an Eye" and then stand before our God trying to justify ourselves for our imperfect and sinful lives. But God truly wants the best for us and He gives us a better way. He allows Jesus to step in and be our Designated Hitter He gives us the rule freely. All we have to do is accept the rule for what it is. By doing so, we become justified by our faith in Jesus Christ rather than our own works. When we do, the world changes for us and we get to see people as Jesus sees them. We get to receive the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us. We become God's hands and feet in this world. And we get to stand in the presence of our God, with our savior at our side.

Grace is truly a great consternation. We cannot fathom how much God must love us to implement such a rule. But we do not have to understand it, just accept it.

AMEN

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