**Relaxing the Law**

Based on [Matthew 5:17-26](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt5.17-26)

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“Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.”

Where I grew up there was only 10 pin bowling. I am not much of a bowler, but my younger brothers were. They were in a bowling league and I remember they had some kind of performance evaluation prior to the season. Afterward, each bowler was given what was called a “handicap”. This meant that, for less able players, the scoring rules were relaxed so that it was easier to compete with better bowlers.

I can see how such scoring keeps the game interesting and rewarding for players of all abilities. It allows players of superior skill not to simply dominate tournaments every time. But the bottom line is that, through relaxing the rules for some, it is easier to compete. There is a logic to it, and since the beginning, Satan has used that logic to twist the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

It is natural for us to think that God will judge us with a handicap. He will judge us based on how hard our circumstances were, and how well we did with what we were naturally endowed. Someone in poverty who steals is not as culpable as someone who is not as desperate. Someone who fights back is not as guilty as someone who begins the fight. A person who lives with lifelong chronic pain has more of an excuse to doubt God’s goodness than a person who is blessed with good health.

These all seem reasonable to us. And in one sense, understanding the circumstances of one’s sin can help us be merciful in helping others. But when it comes to the condition for salvation your performance relative to your life circumstances is irrelevant. In fact, your performance is irrelevant. The only thing relevant to whether you are a child of God or a Son of perdition is faith.

If you trust in God, it doesn’t mean that he will judge you with less severity. That is another natural mistake of men. Imagine if you knew a judge who let his own child off the hook for stealing, and then threw the book at his neighbor’s child. We know that to be favoritism. But God has no favorites; He shows no partiality. When it comes to the law, he doesn’t even favor his own children above unbelievers. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of god, and are justified freely through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Jesus did not just fulfill the harder parts of the law for you. He fulfilled all of it. His righteousness didn’t just offer you a handicap, didn’t just adjust the score your abilities were lacking. His righteousness is entirely yours through faith. This means that, when you turn the other cheek, give to the poor, repay evil with good, care for your enemy, hold your tongue in anger, it is not that you’ve done your part on your own and Jesus adjusts the score. By faith all that you do is done through christ. Your successes are His, your failures are his, and you are his, and he is yours, and he is all in all.

In one of my summer classes, I learned about a new approach to teaching challenging children in a classroom. The old way was to assume that, if a student was being disruptive, or inattentive, it was because he wasn’t trying...and so it was the teachers job to remind him to try harder. The new way is to assume that if a child cannot behave or pay attention, it is because he is lacking something, a skill or a need that the teacher needs to figure out and provide. So don’t blame the child for not paying attention; it’s not his fault...it’s that he lacks the ability.

It seems like a very good, positive approach. But there’s a problem with assuming that kids' failures aren’t their fault. If a student isn’t responsible for his failures, he can’t be responsible for his successes. If you can’t blame little Billy for not paying attention because it’s not his fault; you can’t really praise him when he does. Saying “Good job, Billy...you did it”, requires the understanding that Billy applied himself, he tried hard and succeeded. If you won’t blame billy for his failures; praising him for his successes is meaningless.

Your saviour, Jesus Christ, is not a motivational teacher...who tells you that your failures are not your fault, but praises you when you do good. The whole idea of earning your righteousness before God is thrown out. You are to blame for your failures, but Christ takes the punishment. Christ is to be praised for your successes, but you receive the righteousness. It is a blessed exchange, and it all happens through faith, not works of the law.

Christ did not come to relax the law to accommodate your abilities. He did not come to condemn your failures and praise your accomplishments. He came to pay for your sins and give you salvation and make you holy saints of the living God. The difference between those who are saved and those who will perish eternally is not that some tried harder, and its not that God gave some the ability to keep the law and not others. The difference is faith in Jesus Christ. Believe in his salvation, and you will live a life pleasing in His sight.