

Whenever the general public thinks about church, or about God, or about religion, they usually begin with rules. This is not a misunderstanding on their part as much as it is a condemnation of the way we've presented the church to our society for the last 70 years. Rather than the church being a place where people are welcomed to the Journey of following Christ in community, we have made the church the bastion of behavioral management. "Be good or else..." is the gospel according to almost all of my unchurched friends.

For the Apostle Paul, this would be seen as a good thing in his early career. Known by the more Jewish Saul for the beginning of his life, this man was "a Pharisee of Pharisees." And for those who don't know what a Pharisee is, suffice it to say that it was a party among the Jews who believed that God's Law (the Old Testament) needed to be protected from those who would soften its rules. And the Pharisees had done so for generations, keeping the Jews focused on following God when the world and the foreign ruling powers over them, would have had the Jews dissolving into a Greek worldview. This was the Pharisees, the rule-followers, the Righteous ones. And Saul was the up-and-coming star. Until, that is, Jesus got ahold of him and taught him a very new set of rules and laws to follow.

We are discussing how every one of us is made in the Image of God, and how each of us reflects this image out into the world uniquely. Yet however unique our reflection of God, there are 9 basic aspects of God's image that each of us reflects, and each of us tends to lean pretty heavily toward one of these 9 over the others. We've talked about curiosity, helpfulness, loyalty, and enthusiasm. And today we're talking about a 5th aspect of God that we reflect: Order.

We all have a desire for rules, for order, for boundaries, for justice and fairness. It is ingrained in us, and it takes a lot to undermine that. Disagree? Try giving one sibling twice as much ice cream and just see how soon the aggrieved pleads, "but that's not fair!" We don't have to be taught what fair is, what equity is, what justice looks like. It is a characteristic of God, part of God's image, that we all embody, reflect, and even appreciate. Social scientists tell us that while adolescents constantly cry for freedom, the freedom that they need is freedom within boundaries. "Yes, you may use the car and you can go anywhere you like, within our town and within a reasonable timeframe." Sure, they'll scream and cry about how unfair it is, and how all their friends have more freedom than they do, but healthy parenting is to help them to slowly grow their own boundaries rather than forcing ours on them too long. In our household, we make the decisions for our kids in elementary school, help them make the decisions in middle school, and let them make the decisions in high school (of course, within reason). That way when they fail (which we all do; it's called learning), we're still around to help them through the consequences.

We don't have to be taught what justice is. In fact, it takes the world a lot of time to teach us to override that natural drive with things like selfishness, injustice, racism, sexism, ageism, and a whole host of other "-isms". When things are not fair and not just, you know someone has learned to overcome their natural instincts.

So how do we override the world's teachings against justice? Get back to the bible! Not the rules – I'm not proposing we return to the Old Testament and live by a law again. The bible is the easiest way for us to rekindle and strengthen our relationship with God. And the closer we are to Him, the more we see with His eyes, and the more His image is reflected in us.