

IF YOU CHANGE THE RULES, YOU CHANGE THE GAME (Don't widen the Plate)

INTRODUCTION

An interesting story has been circulated on the Internet about a former coach who made a presentation about the “home plate” in the game of baseball should always be 17 inches wide, and never altered to make it convenient for any age group or age of a man, to allow them to participate because it is too difficult for them to abide by the rules of the game, which has a “rule” regarding the size of home plate.

If the rules are changed, the game is changed, even if we do not change the name. This is true in the game of baseball, and if the rules are not followed, we may still **call** it “baseball”. This is true in spiritual matters as well.

1. In baseball, Abner Doubleday is now deceased and will never know if his game has been changed, along with the rules.
2. In spiritual matters, the founder of Christianity is alive in heaven, and has left RULES for us to follow, which are recorded in the pages of Scripture.

In society in America today, we have experienced the widening of the plate in the rewarding of children in schools, by giving an award to everyone, whether they complied with the rules or not. Some in our government want to give citizenship to anyone who wants it, whether they come in by the rules or not. In baseball, there is the official rule book. In Christianity, there is also a rule book.

DISCUSSION

I. 1st, THE RULE FOR THE CHURCH IS THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Phil. 3:16 “Nevertheless, where unto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”

- A. Several passages in the New Testament affirm this. 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:15; Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 14:37; Jude 3; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:16.
(Explain connection between passages)
- B. God warned that “rule changers” would arise. Acts 20:(28- 32); Tit. 1:9-11
 1. Novation of 251 A.D. was “sprinkled” as an emergency when thought to be on his death-bed, which opened the door to other actions than immersion.
 2. Catholicism developed the practice of “clinical baptism” for candidates desiring salvation in extreme health conditions.

II. 2nd, SHALL WE WIDEN THE PLATE IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS TODAY?

- A. Consider a few suppositions.
 1. What if God had “widened the plate” for obedience for Adam and Eve and allowed them to stay in the garden if it was too difficult to refrain eating the forbidden fruit?
 2. What if God had “widened the plate” to the wicked in Noah's day who

- could not resist the temptation to engage in wickedness?
3. Should God have “widened the plate” for Uzzah and not kill him for touching the Ark of the Covenant?
 4. Should God have “widened the plate” for Moses and let him go ahead and enter Canaan even though he struck the instead of speaking to it as God commanded?

B. Now let's consider some spiritual examples of “widening the plate.”

1 Cor. 6:9-10. “Know ye not that the unrighteousness shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, not extortion, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

1. In the matter of **salvation**:
 - a. Should we “widen the plate” for those who hear, but refuse to believe? Cf Matt. 13:15
 - b. Should we “widen the plate” for those who believe but refuse to repent of their sins? Cf Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3
 - c. Should we “widen the plate” for those who believe and repent but refuse to confess faith in Jesus? Cf John 12:42-43
 - d. Should we “widen the plate” for those who refuse to be baptized? Cf Luke 7:29-30; Mark 16:16
 - e. Should we “widen the plate” for those who prefer “sprinkling” above immersion? Cf Rom. 6:3-5
2. In the matter of **worship**:
 - a. Should we “widen the gate” because some had rather sing with the accompaniment of a piano rather than acapella singing?
 - b. Should we “widen the gate” and add cornbread and beans to the Lord's Table for those who get hungry on Sunday morning?
3. In the matter of **fellowship**:
 - a. Should we “widen” the plate and allow membership to young people who “live together” rather than being married?
 - b. Should we “widen the plate” for homosexuals who wish to be married?
 - c. Should we “widen the plate” for those who want more than one wife?
 - d. Should we “widen the plate” for those who divorce and remarry without the scriptural grounds of fornication? Matt. 19:9
 - e. Should a man who is divorced for **his** fornication and then wants to bring his new wife and himself into the church without making any correction, should we “widen the plate” for them?
 - f. If a drunk wants fellowship in the church while vowing to never stop drinking, should we “widen the plate” for him?

CONCLUSION

- I. Remember, if we change the rules, we change the game.
 - A. If in baseball you change the size of the home plate or the size of the bat or the infield, and still **call** it “baseball”, it changes the game.
 - B. The religious world today has already changed the rule (for themselves) and have changed their name, but still want to be called a “church.”
 - C. Some congregations of the church of Christ have also changed the rule (for themselves).
 1. Some are dropping the term “of Christ” to keep from offending those who resent anyone today being the church “of Christ.”
 2. Some prefer the name “Community Church” to the “church of Christ” or some other name that does not honor Christ
 3. The true church of Christ does not wear a human designated name of any kind, for we have no authority to re-name it for the head, and to name it something else literally **makes** it something else other than the church Jesus built.
- II. Let's always keep the rules and refuse to “widen the plate” in rebellion to God.