

## Within Bounds

The other morning while I was riding my scooter over here I saw the Sheriff's van pull out of the Erickson back road followed by a Mountie on an motorcycle heading off in a conveyer. My hunch was that someone was on *the wrong side of the law*. "Law" is one of those difficult words that is loaded with meaning. So in referring to the Bible, instead of "law" I like to use the Hebrew word **Torah**, often *translated* "law," but in the Bible, meaning something quite different from our modern concept of the law.

*Torah* (or Old Testament Law) is often viewed BY MODERN Christians as the Ten commandments followed by vast a collection of miscellaneous, and often curious rules and even bizarre regulations, often pertaining to ancient sacrifices and practices we know little about, nor do we ever incorporate into our daily lives. In the popular imagination, perhaps, as first explained to children, Torah is all the laws in the Bible, (and it turns out there are over 700 of them). And if an Israelite would obey every single one of those commandments perfectly all his or her life, they would have lived a life pleasing to God, and they would go to heaven. But of course, no one ever *did*, until Jesus who lived the perfect life, and then died for our sin.

Actually a fuller understanding this curious collection of laws we call Torah would be to see it as is Israel's "covenant document." Almost like a treaty between Israel and God. It's aim was to give life it's basic intention, "to lead us in the paths of righteousness" And to be "*righteous*" in the Hebrew sense, was *to live within the boundaries* of Torah. And Torah was instruction that would keep one on the right path. And in the Hebrew mind, that always meant "*membership in good standing*" within the covenant people. To *leave* the path of Torah, one would be in danger of being left behind – lost in the desert, left to die.

The problem was what to do, if someone *did* trespass the boundaries of the Torah. Think of it in terms of . . .

### **Skiing out of bounds.**

Every year in this country dozens die from this. The snow is great, the lure, they say is almost irresistible. But the signpost and the safety tape across the trail represents a boundary: on one side safety, on the other, uncertainty and even possible death. To follow Torah is to ski within bounds. But with Jesus the understanding of those bounds: what is *in* and what is *out* changed.

Jesus made possible the restoration of our human nature to right relationship with God through his death, resurrection and ascension. So although we are still very fragile beings who still face sin and death, the consequence of that has been dealt with by Christ on the cross. And with the coming of His Spirit into the hearts of the believers, God inaugurated a new covenant with a new covenant people who received his Spirit. Those who are members in good standing in this covenant inherit the promise of new life. But because we Christians are still "in the flesh," we still face a big problem: how are we to stay within bounds? How do we know when we've gone out of bounds? And how do we get back in once we've transgressed the boundaries of the covenant?

In Roman's chapter 8 Paul is describing what marks out the new covenant's boundary. And picking up the thought in verse 12 of Romans 8, with the new covenant comes. . .

### **A new obligation**

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is *not* to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; *but if by the Spirit* you

put to death the misdeeds of the body, *you will live.* “

Even though Christians we are truly part of God's new creation, there is still part of us that, by its very nature, is still controlled by the power of sin. Paul calls this “the mind of the flesh,” and says in Romans 8:7 that *this* part of us doesn't submit to God because it simply *can't*. So even though we may, in our minds, acknowledge the *rightness* of God's path, that doesn't count as *obedience*; because, there is always this part of us that is still skiing out of bounds and indeed *enjoying* it regardless of the peril it brings.

*But* those who have received Jesus Christ as saviour and have the gift of his Spirit, possess a *new part* of human nature, one that *does* have the ability to meet our obligation to God and stay within bounds: Those who are *not* controlled by the flesh, are “*in the Spirit.*” And those in the Spirit don't merely acknowledge God's boundaries, but continue to ski outside them, but truly stay within bounds because they have truly grasped *deepest intentions* of God's Torah and thereby *actually* please God with their lives. So the Torah still remains the boundary marker of the covenant people, but only as the *Spirit works* in the heart of a believer to “lead us in the paths of righteousness.”

So in the letter to the Romans, was ground-breaking stuff in the first century. Paul is completely re-thinking Israel's story, the world's story and ultimately *God's* story on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of his Holy Spirit. And this also means re-thinking the how the Torah functions as the covenant boundary marker, and what it means to live day by day in a genuine relationship with God. Torah is not ethnic or political. It's the Law of the Spirit. It's not about following a fixed set of rules. No. The closest thing we could compare it to in our own experience is being. . .

### **One of the family**

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the *children* of God.

I've spent some time in Amish over the years, and there's an old custom I've heard about (although I've never seen it myself) that at an Amish farm auction, when a farm is sold and its goods are liquidated, all the household articles are spread out on the front lawn on tables. But in the middle of the yard are a number of articles set apart by a rope. Among these special roped-off items will invariably be the family's wonderful hand-sewn *quilts* for which the Amish are so famous. The rule is that anyone can bid on stuff on tables all around the yard, but the articles *inside* that rope can only be bid on by members of the Amish community. These are treasures the Amish want to keep within their community. But there's also a more practical reason for this: One of those wonderful quilts could easily fetch hundreds, if not thousands of dollars from a savvy dealer from the city – there's a market for these quilts. But that would put bidding far beyond the reach of a typical Amish family looking for a good second hand quilt, so only the Amish will be allowed to bid on it and will sell for a very modest price, not to adorn the wall of someone's stylish studio apartment, but to be used for the purpose for which it was created: to keep a young Amish couple warm a night.

The Amish are very clear in the boundaries. They define their community by the way they dress, their mode of transportation.

*A hand painted sign on the back of an Amish carriage* read:

*"Energy-efficient vehicle. Runs on oats and grass. Caution: Do not step on exhaust."*

But while we may admire the Amish for their simple life and recognize they are devoted Christians. And while it's easy to identify the boundaries of the Amish community: who is in the

who is out, *these are not the things that God, by his Spirit sets as the boundaries for the New Testament people of God.* So what *are* the markers the Spirit sets so that we know we are in the family? The first and foremost one, according to Paul in verse 15 is .

### **Fearlessness**

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

There is much in our world to cause us fear. But by the Spirit we perceive God as our Father.

A dad was camping with his kids. It'd rained all day, but now it's clearing in the West. The sun has appeared framed by towers of billowing cloud. They stand gazing up *at the awesome handiwork of God.* And the kids ohh and aah as they gaze at the sunset splashed across the Western sky. But then he hears a little whine and feels a little tug on his pants, “Daddy I can't see the *sun*, I just see clouds, they look *bad!*” The four-year-old from her knee-high angle can only see the clouds. *She has no way to see the glory of the sunset.* So dad picks her up, and “Oooh!” Her vision expands to catch coloured light bathing the mountains. And now she's *satisfied.* She's seen the glory. The fear is gone.

God is *here*, to lift us up. And we need to listen carefully for the longing of every man woman and child to *see the GLORY.* And pray that God will lift them by the message of the Gospel.

John says, “there's no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment . . .” (ref) But the faithful death of Jesus made things right and nothing can now keep us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But that fear is only defeated when we receive . . .

### **The Inner Witness**

16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children”.

One weekend years ago Korleen and I looked after a couple of little kids for a few days. These people had recently immigrate from Germany and the parents didn't know too many people who the kid's knew and would feel secure with. So the first night we made lots of popcorn and just tired them out and put them to bed. And then we went to bed. But in the middle of the night, the little boy woke up:

"Doug! Where's the light?"

I realized that there was maybe not a single night in his life so far that there had not been a night light glowing in the hallway, and when he woke up all of a sudden, and there was no light he was terrified. The light in the hall revealed to him the “atmosphere of home”. It created a circle of comfort and security he needed. In the dark, it was as if nothing existed, home is gone, he's *alone* in the dark. But if the light was on it was OK.

The Spirit's works within our consciousness. Our spirit is *conjoined* with God's Spirit. There's no where we can go that he is not with us.

### **Promise of Love**

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The movie Wall-E tells the story of two robots. It takes place 700 years from now. The

Earth has no more human inhabitants (they've all left on a space ship because the earth's environment has become too toxic) and Wall-E is this little robot who's function is to gather up the trash of Earth, compact it and pile it in neat piles. When they left, they forgot to turn Wall-E off, so he's kept piling up trash for 700 years. Enter EVE, the other robot who arrives as a probe to determine whether the Earth is able to sustain life. EVE's mission is to discover plant life. And this is a love story between these two robots.

Now each robot is hard-wired to do its job, but you can do things in a full length animated feature that defy the laws of physics. So these two little robots develop personalities, and become sweethearts, but have to overcome what they've been programmed for.

According to Andrew Stanton who wrote and directed the movie:

“The greatest commandment Christ gives us is to love, but that's not always our priority. So I came up with this premise. . love defeats the world's programming. You've got these two robots that are trying to go above their basest directives, literally their programming, to experience love.”

In this world we live, we are constantly being programmed to follow certain routines and habits. But that can distract us to the point that we're not really making connections to the people next to us. We're not engaging in real relationships, which, after all, are why we are alive. To have a relationship with God and with other people. Which bring us to . . .

### **This Table**

On the cross, Jesus made atonement for our sin. That means we can transcend our sinful human nature and live according to the Spirit. Communion reminds us that Jesus gave his very life so that we could come fully within bounds. What is pictured here is the supreme act of love that created a community the boundary of which is love. As we eat this bread, drink from this cup, the Spirit creates the awareness that we are in fact, one family. One Body. And the boundary is simply how love behaves.

Paul says:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. . . .and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8, 9 (NIV)