

INTRODUCTION

Freedom is not the absence of boundaries. It is the opportunity to move forward unhindered. Boundaries are needed in many situations in order to give that freedom. Athletes and swimmers need to keep in lane; otherwise they will hinder each other. They also need to keep to a training regime. And they have to compete according to the rules. The same thing is true in the Christian life. Here are some of the boundaries within which we are free to strive towards the goal.

THE LOVE OF GOD

“Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21). The Apostle John speaks of this as a relationship of love. It is not “all about me”; neither is it “all about Him”. In the Christian life it is “all about us”.

There is a mutual commitment, a giving of ourselves to one another – God to us and we to God. It begins with his love (1 John 4:10) but the relationship must include our love in response to him. Jude calls us to maintain that relationship.

This is very different from the Pharisees’ conception of godliness. This is no clinical ‘correctness’, but a living relationship. As with any relationship it needs work to maintain it. It involves communication. It involves his care and response to our prayers; and our listening and obedience.

This is one of the boundaries within which the Christian operates. Without it we will not progress towards the goal.

We need the Holy Spirit’s help to keep ourselves in the love of God.

THE LAW OF GOD

There are frequent misunderstandings about the Law of God. That is not surprising when we consider the Christian is not under law but under grace. Two points of clarification are needed.

The relationship of the believer to God is not a legal one. There is no longer any question of our acceptance being dependent on our performance. It is all of his grace. The word “law” is used in different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to a relationship that is legal in nature, and the terms of that relationship. Sometimes it refers to God’s instructions and guidance (e.g. the wisdom literature). It can also refer to the other parts of Scripture – including the poetic and historical parts. The relationship is not a legal one (but a family one), and “Law” is God’s Word to his children, his direction for how to live our lives. It is not a basis for relating to God; it is a rule of life.

The Psalmist wrote, “O how I love your law”. The Christian echoes that, for it is God’s word to him, and he wants to please him. Therefore he meditates on God’s Law day and night (Psalm 1).

Living in accordance with God’s instructions is part of the ‘rules’ the Christian has to keep in order to reach the goal. We sin, but we make no progress while we do. Christ will reward his servants – those who keep his word.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The only way we can expect to live to please God is by the help of his Spirit. Jesus told the disciples they could do nothing without him, and promised “another Helper”.

Paul wrote of the Law's inability to lead us into righteousness, but added that we can fulfil God's righteous demands by the Spirit dwelling in us (Romans 8:4).

Christ is in all the Scripture, but the Spirit opens our eyes to see him. So he not only informs (by his Word to us), he also makes Christ precious by his work in us.

When God promised the Holy Spirit through the prophet Jeremiah (31:33-34) he spoke of him as writing God's law in our heart. John echoes that by saying that his law is not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

The Spirit also helps our prayers, for "we do not know what to pray for as we should but the Spirit helps" (Romans 8:26)

If we ignore God's law we will 'transgress' – move out of our lane. And if we try to run without the Spirit's help we will find ourselves running on the spot. Jesus encourages us to pray for the Holy Spirit.

THE FAMILY OF GOD

We do not run alone.

"God is love." That is evident within the Holy Trinity. In Creation he shared his blessedness with others. In redemption he gathers the lost so they may have his blessedness restored. As a parent loves to have the family around, so God gathers his lost ones to himself. That means we are not alone in pursuing the goal, and we should share his love for the others who are doing so.

Love is part of the image of Christ to which God's people are to be conformed. In order to love we need others. The believer has a sense of attachment to the people of God and a desire for their company. Christ has given us his church partly to give us opportunity to love. His last command was "Love one another as I have loved you." It is not natural for a family member to absent himself from a family gathering without good reason. And it is not natural for a Christian to be absent from the regular gatherings for worship and fellowship.

If we do not love the brethren we are not acting according to the rule of the Christian life – we are transgressing the boundaries.

CONCLUSION

The goal is set – God is calling us upward. In order to reach it we must abide by the rules (2 Timothy 2:3-7).

That includes: keeping in the love of God; living by the Law of God; helped by the Spirit of God, and as part of the family of God.