

Out Of Bounds

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I think spring and fall have always been my favorite times of the year, but I would have to give an edge to spring. Life begins anew and everything is fresh and beautiful. The spring holy days. And then of course you have March Madness. Now for those of you that are athletically challenged and are unfamiliar with the term, it is the college basketball equivalent of the playoffs in the World Series. You take the 64 best college teams and you play 63 games in all. It started last Thursday. I remember watching many, many great games over the years.

And growing up I played, I guess, about every sport except maybe hockey and cricket, and I guess I did not play any water polo. But I played a lot of sports, but I eventually settled on basketball as my favorite for an obvious reason. As I have grown older though, my interest is greatly diminished in watching and playing sports. If you would have told me five years ago even that at this point in my life I would not be involved in a basketball league or a softball league, I would not have believed it. So I do not really pay much attention anymore except for March Madness. It does still generate a lot of interest for me.

I think in many ways, and some of you may disagree, but as far as the sport that mankind has invented, basketball is a real good complete sport. Individuals can excel, but you have to play team ball to succeed. Since its invention back in 1891 by Dr. Naismith, it has not really changed as much as you might think. For generations now, the game has been played on a rectangular court measuring 94 ft by 50 ft. And we are still shooting a ball 9 inches in diameter at a goal 10 ft high and 18 inches across. Now that is not to say that playing styles have not changed because you do not see any two-handed set shots anymore, but the rules have stayed pretty static: four 8 minute quarters in high school, two 20 minute halves in college; five

personal fouls, you sit down; five players on a side, two guards, two forwards, one center. If you play basketball by the rules, it is a very enjoyable game and it is a lot of fun to watch.

But I have noticed sports in general, that as the professional version takes center stage, there is a lessening of adherence to the rules. In some cases there is no enforcement of the rules at all. Now when you play basketball this way, it is chaotic and it is dangerous, and if you have ever been on the playground playing where the rule was no blood, no foul, you know it can get violent. I think basketball can serve, and it will serve for this sermon, as a metaphor for life.

Now what comes to your mind when I say Dennis Rodman? He is a forward for the NBA Chicago Bulls. You might think Day-Glo hair, body piercing, cross dresser, violent, abusive, spoiled. It is a case where a mediocre ballplayer has been turned into a cultural icon by two things: an adoring press and a very tolerant society. We in America have always been taken with those among us who defy authority, the rebel. And especially when we are young, we admire that type of person.

Now Dennis Rodman is not the disease. He is just a symptom of the problem. He is someone that we can live vicariously through as we watch him thumb his nose at convention.

I think the deterioration of the structure of basketball at all levels mirrors what has happened in American society. Now in times past, if a player fell out of bounds with the ball, at most he is guilty of a turnover, meaning the other team takes possession. Nowadays Dennis Rodman goes out of bounds and he kicks a photographer in the groin, and he draws only a fine and a suspension. No criminal charges, no banishment from the game, no public uproar.

Now you try that. Walk down the street and punch a stranger in the nose and see what happens to you. And in Rodman's case, you would think you would lose endorsements, but no, they are lined up. According to John Leo writing in *US News and World Report*, Rodman has become the current poster boy

of the transgressive culture, just as Madonna was once its poster girl. Now if you are like me, you did not even know that jerks and rebels had a fancy name for what they do: transgressive culture.

Mr. Leo gave other examples of transgressive culture. Larry Flynt. Now there is a lowlife if one ever lived, and they made a movie glorifying his life. Charles Manson, did you know he has his own clothing line now? Those are examples of transgressive culture. We live in a time when antisocial behavior is just another lifestyle option.

Now the word transgressive, as you probably can figure out, is just another form of transgress. Transgress means to go beyond or over a limit, or go over a boundary, to act in violation of a law, to trespass, and obviously, to sin. We are all familiar with I John 3:4.

I John 3:4 (KJV) Sin is the transgression of the law.

Let us turn to I Thessalonians 4, verse 6. Reading here from the King James. Breaking into the middle of the thought.

I Thessalonians 4:6 (KJV) That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

This phrase "go beyond" in the King James means literally to go over. Overstep the limits you might say, and those limits would be the ones separating sin from righteousness. The Amplified Bible does use the word transgress.

Now if a basketball court had no boundaries, no sideline, no end line, no half court, what would happen? You would have anarchy, confusion, just total bedlam.

Picture, if you would, a basketball game in progress with no boundaries and you have got one guy passing to his teammate up in the bleachers and he passes it to the guy over by the hot dog stand and then he kicks it out to his teammate in the parking lot. It will not work. You have to have boundaries. You have to have rules and limits.

Now in the Philips translation of I Thessalonians 4, the little subheading that many translators put for his subheading of verses 1 through 12, he put Purity, Love, and Hard Work are Good Rules for Life. And then I would like to read his translation of verse 6.

I Thessalonians 4:6 (Phillips) You cannot break this rule without cheating and exploiting your fellow men. Indeed, God will punish all who do offend in this matter.

People do not like limits. We do not want boundaries on our lives. And it is much worse when we are young. We especially chafe under authority when we are young. But whether we are young or old and whether we are willing to admit it or not, there is always someone that we have to answer to. There is always someone over us, even Dennis Rodman has someone over him as weak as he may be.

We have boundaries set forth in the Bible that govern our lives, and we know that. And if we stay within these limits, we know that we can live life successfully. If we go out of bounds, we know there are corresponding penalties.

The Greek word for limit is *horizo*. We get our English word horizon from that, you know, the limits of your sight would be the horizon.

Now *horizo* is a root of another Greek word. I am not exactly sure of its pronunciation. I am going to say *aphorizo*. It is *horizo* with *ap* in front of it. The prefix *apo* means separation, and *horizo* I told you means limits. So the word *aphorizo* means to set off by boundary. *Young's Concordance* says to border off. So keep that in mind, to border off.

Let us look at the use of this word in Matthew 25, verse 32. Mr. Ritenbaugh was reading this passage last week in his sermon.

Matthew 25:32 (KJV) And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats.

This word separate is *aphorizo*. The sheep are bordered off, severed, separated from the goats. I remember a comment that Mr. Ritenbaugh made at the feast in one of his sermons that fit well with what I am talking about here. He said, "God sees a sharp division between His people and the world." This world glorifies those that break the rules, those that bend the rules. Case in point is Bill Clinton. "I never saw the buck. Hillary got it. You know, it never got to me. I don't know." And we think he is wonderful. Not we, not us here, but you know what I mean.

Those that work hard and try to live a good life, they are the ones that are called Puritans or worse words, much worse. I think *Vine's Expository Dictionary* has some interesting comments on this word *aphorizo*, and I want to want to quote a couple of things from them. They listed three examples of the use of this word in the Bible and three different things that it meant to us as Christians. First of all, what a Christian must do. Second, what a Christian must be prepared to suffer. And third, what a Christian must avoid. Let us look first at II Corinthians 6, verse 17. And these three verses I am going to read all use this word *aphorizo*.

II Corinthians 6:17 (KJV) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

This would be an example of separation from unbelievers. A Christian separating from unbelievers.

The second example is in Luke 6, verse 22.

Luke 6:22 (KJV) Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company.

This word separation is again *aphorizo*, and this is an example of being separated by the unbelievers. Being put away by the unbelievers.

The third thing is in Galatians 2, verse 12.

Galatians 2:12 (KJV) For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles [this is speaking of Peter]: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

A Christian must avoid withdrawing from brethren.

Now the rest of the time that I have, I want to key on that first item again, separation from unbelievers, and I want to go back to II Corinthians 6, verse 17. A little background here. The city of Corinth was notorious during the time that the book of Corinthians was written for its debauchery. The town (or the city) was 50 miles west of Athens, Greece, and it was one of the largest and most important cities of the Roman Empire. One writer said, speaking of the city of Corinth, that "it was a renowned and voluptuous city where the vices of east and west met." That was the worst of both worlds in that respect.

Adam Clarke says about this city because it embraced the commerce of the whole Mediterranean Sea, it had become very wealthy. The people were very well to do. And Adam Clarke said that these riches produced a luxury and this luxury produced a total corruption of manners. Does that sound familiar? As an example of this total corruption, public prostitution was a very important part of their ministry, of their religion. It was so prevalent that in that day and time the verb to corinthianize meant to play the prostitute.

So the brethren at Corinth were totally surrounded by decadence. Yet they had jobs in this city. Their kids went to school in this city. They probably went to the theater and they shopped all in this morally bankrupt society—exactly like us. But even then limits were in place. They had boundaries.

Now back in II Corinthians 6, Paul is warning them against becoming entangled in the world. I would like to read verse 14 through chapter 7, verse 1, which is only six verses, from the Phillips translation. Verse 14 starts off, and it is the famous one from the King James about being not unequally yoked.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 (Phillips) Don't link up with unbelievers and try to work with them. What common interest can there be between goodness and evil? How can light and darkness share life together? How can there be harmony between Christ and the devil? What can a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What common ground can idols hold with the temple of God? For we, remember, are ourselves temples of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing [meaning do not do what God forbids or go out of bounds, you might say]. And I will receive you and will be to you a Father, and you shall be to Me sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

II Corinthians 7:1 (Phillips) With these promises ringing in our ears, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from anything that pollutes body and soul. Let us prove our reverence for God by consecrating ourselves to Him completely.

Now from these verses and from what I have told you about the city of Corinth, you can surmise that being separate, *aphorizo*, it is a spiritual removal. As I pointed out, they lived in that city. They worked there, they shopped there. We are talking about a spiritual removal. I am talking about being constantly on guard and evaluating every instance of your life as to how it applies to the limits that we have been taught.

All of us, some more than others, at one time or another, we have had our moments of rebellion. We have even done our own versions of kick the photographer. One can only hope that as we have grown older, we have also grown wiser, and we have learned that happiness comes from obedience.

Now on a basketball court, the boundaries are nothing more than painted lines. They are just lines painted on wood. Our spiritual limits are also self-imposed and by that I mean, for example, there is no set of bars that come across your door on Friday night preventing you from working or shopping or breaking the Sabbath in any manner. Those limits are not physical. Those are self-imposed. The borders that we have in our life are set by the knowledge that God has given us.

They should likewise be well defined. The lines on a basketball court are not fuzzy or gray or have big gaps where they are missing. They are very distinct. And the same lines, I might add, apply to *all* the players. We do not have a different set of boundaries for every player. What kind of confusion would that create? In our minds we have to see our spiritual boundaries in the same way, very clear, very distinct.

I think I have a minute or two, and let me mention one of the parts of this analogy. Occasionally players need help in understanding the rules, and that is where referees come in. The referee is supposed to know the rulebook frontwards, backwards, inside and out, and he can interpret the rules for the players. And if a player does want to dispute strenuously, the referee can send him down. And of course, like I pointed out, the lines are just painted on the court. At any time the player can leave the game. Nothing keeps him there. These are all self-imposed limits.

I think in this analogy as I am talking here, the minister would take the place of the referee. And I think that is fairly self-explanatory.

You look around the world and we see a glorification of this so-called transgressive culture. I do not know if that is a term we will see more of or not. I certainly hope not, but I suspicion we will. It is a world that admires rebellion and perversion. And it is a world that seeks to snare us. And this time of year coming up on the spring holidays, we know how active Satan is, that he walks the land. We have seen him in action.

And we have to keep within our mind the limits and boundaries that we have been taught. And we have to realize that by living a life separate—meaning spiritual separation, severed spiritually from the world, speaking of spiritual—living a life separate that way, God promises here in the verses that I have just read, to receive us and to be a Father to us.