

The New Walk

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United Reformed Church (formerly Presbyterian)

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From Rev. Philp Tiplady:

On the day I am writing this the main story on the news at lunchtime was from the football World Cup. A United States player had been sent off in his last match and should therefore be suspended from the next according to the rules of the tournament. This suspension had been cancelled because the United States president had got involved.

This wasn't the first time rules were overridden at this World Cup. There was the well known player who should have been suspended for his country's first two matches, but the suspension period was reduced to make him available for all matches.

I would say that the fairness of sporting competition depends on the existence of clear rules that are understood and can be applied easily, then the competitors can know that they have won or lost because of their own efforts and skill and not because of some unfairness.

Unfortunately this pure game rarely exists. The rule book of any sport grows bigger over the years as ambiguities are found in the existing rules and the solutions to newly discovered issues are set out. Then there are the growing numbers of officials, and, more recently, technological solutions that are used to judge what has actually happened.

These issues aren't limited to sports. We elect people to change laws to fit new situations. People are employed to ensure that the laws are followed. The tax system is always being changed to fix loopholes or provide incentives for particular behaviours and then changed again as new issues and new opportunities are discovered.

In the New Testament, a dominant theme is the place of the law in the life of the community, whether it is the Jewish community in which Jesus lived or the developing church community as the followers of Christ found their own identity.

Jesus was often debating with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are often thought of as the guardians of the law, the ones who developed rules to ensure that the law was protected, while Jesus was the one who appealed to the intention behind the law as reasoning why the law should not apply, notably in terms of his attitude towards Sabbath law.

Therefore, we might say, as followers of the way of Christ we should not be slaves to the law, but be willing to follow the path of best intentions, or, as we might say, following the leading of the Spirit. Then we shall find true Christian freedom.

But we know examples of people who say they have found a better way of following Christ and gather a community around them. Sometimes it might be a Wesley finding a more real way of following Christ for his day, sometimes it might be something that goes terribly wrong, leaving people badly damaged.

So I would say we cannot have total freedom from law, we need that framework to make sense of living in the world. But we cannot be slaves to the law, ready to stand against it where it has gone badly wrong, while following the judgement of the community. It's not an easy answer, but easy answers don't always exist.

Philip

Services for July and August

July 5th	11am Service, led by Rev. Mike Playdon; also on Zoom
July 12th	11am Service, led by Rev. Philip Tiplady; also on Zoom
July 19th	11am Service, led by Mr. David Coxhead; also on Zoom
July 26th	11am Service, led by Rev. David Howlett; also on Zoom
Aug. 2rd	11am Service, led by Rev. Mike Playdon; also on Zoom
Aug. 9th	11am Service, led by Rev. David Howlett; also on Zoom
Aug. 16th	11am Service, led by Rev. Paul Ellis; also on Zoom
Aug. 23rd	11am Service, led by Rev. Philip Tiplady; also on Zoom
Aug. 30th	11am Service; led by Mr. Andrew Bodsworth; also on Zoom

