

Boundaries in Relationships

By B. D. Tate

I have shared about boundaries before. These boundaries keep us on the straight and narrow; they are meant to protect and guide us. Do you remember the boundaries?

Four main principles for boundaries:

- 1) **We are to make no provision for the flesh or sin nature (Rom. 13:14)**. We are to recognize that we will lose the battle against the lusts of our flesh if we provide for it. We need the Holy Spirit to empower us to live grace-filled lives. Losing the battle against the flesh means we are living according to the flesh and this will hinder the grace of God in our lives. In other words, if we provide for temptation we will not win. Good leadership then sets up boundaries that do not provide for the flesh. For example: A married man should not be alone (privately) with another woman who is not his wife. A man should not be watching pornography, for to look upon another woman lustfully is sin. (Matt. 5:27,28)
- 2) **We are to avoid the very appearance of evil** (I Thes. 5:22). God places boundaries in our lives so that we will not sin against Him. Those boundaries include not providing opportunities by way of appearances. It may be that nothing is wrong, but if it looks like it, we are not being good leaders. A male coach driving home a girl player from soccer practice alone. Nothing may be going on, but neither can he prove it. It can look improper. A boss spending time alone in the office with doors shut with another woman...not only does it provide for the flesh, it appears that evil could be going on.
- 3) **We are to be beyond reproach and have a good reputation as leaders** (I Tim. 3:7 & I Tim. 4:12). If someone leads in the church and then spends his/her week in questionable dealings, acting in questionable ways, lying, stealing, taking advantage, etc...the world will know this person as being someone who cannot be trusted. A bad reputation reflects upon Christ and is reproachable.
- 4) **We are to be an example to the flock of God** (I Pet. 2:21,22 & Matt. 5:13,14 & 16). This godly example is not only while in the church but outside as well. We are not to practice immorality, fornication, drunkenness, lying, deceiving, or any other sinful way. We are being watched by all, especially the younger generations. **If we are permitted to practice open, willful, and unrepentant sin, this is a bad example.** Furthermore, such things will not be of the Spirit but of the flesh. God's anointing will not be upon any leader or church that willfully, defiantly, practices disobedience to His Word.

By understanding these principles in our lives we **walk in righteousness and avoid evil**. We are to apply these principles to all relationships especially dating relationships. If you watch TV shows and movies, soap operas, or any sitcom, you'll notice that just about all of them teach us by example to break these boundaries. The deception is that acting is not real life, and the consequences they create are not real. When people in real life act the way they do, the consequences they create are not written out of the next episode. The consequences of real life remain.

I have shared with you about these boundaries in marriage relationships and as leaders in the Church. The above principles apply absolutely but there are more. One of the best boundaries

is to be mutually submissive in marriage to each other based upon God's Word and love. **I state it this way:** My wife has a right to know, approve, or disapprove of every relationship I have, especially those of the opposite sex. We live together in a communion that is protected by agreement. If my wife is uncomfortable with any female relationship I may have or attempt to have, she has veto power over it. If I am relating to others without her knowledge then I am practicing outside the bounds of my marriage—this is deception. A clear boundary then is that her relationships and mine are subject to each other and by mutual agreement we proceed in life to relate to others.

A marriage boundary then is **mutual agreement and mutual submission to each other**. This boundary plays out in many forms. I already mentioned relationships but it also applies to decisions in the marriage. Husbands and wives are to live in **consideration** of each other when it comes to work, careers, family, money, entertainment, recreation, vacations, hobbies, purchases, even meals. This consideration is about checking with, touching base with, discussing and debating what decisions are going to happen. Boundaries for marriage are crossed when inconsideration takes place. **Boundaries instill trust when consideration leads to discussion, which can or should lead to debate and then finally agreement. When agreement is reached and permission granted by both partners, then they are granting each other a blessing to proceed with whatever decision is being made.** God's will is accomplished when married couples operate with a high degree of consideration. Consideration also promotes honor and dignity to and for our mates. This honor is not to be given to another it belongs in the marriage.

Boundaries exist to provide peace and protection. Boundaries help us manage our lives and keep our priorities in order. One such boundary is financial in that God requires us to tithe. This boundary comes with a promise of His blessing and fruitfulness and protection against the devourer. This boundary helps us keep our trust not in money or our career but in God almighty where it belongs.

Boundaries in relationships also help us to keep our lives in order in regards to what I am responsible for and what I am not responsible for. Boundaries help me to manage my relationships with others so that I know where I end and someone else begins. Often lives that are lived without structure and without fences are very stressful and out of control lives. God has given us life as He has it which is both individual with self-identity and communal and the need be in relationship with others. A well-balanced life experiences both individuality and group identity. When Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as our self, this golden rule sums up the greatest boundary we are to exercise and practice. Love respects personal boundaries and the boundaries of others.

When someone tries to control others love is violated and boundaries are crossed.

When someone tries to dominate decisions love is violated and boundaries crossed.

When our free will is manipulated love is violated and boundaries are crossed.

We are each responsible for our own souls. We can only truly effect change in our own lives. When we try to change others through nagging, coercing, deceiving, misrepresenting, propaganda, pressuring, using guilt, etc. ***we are playing the Satan***. Satan wills to override the will of others, to keep people in darkness, ignorance, used and abuse.

I want to introduce you to several more laws of boundaries that will help each of us to be people of God, loving and kind, forgiving and supporting; yet, speak the truth in love so that all are built up into the image of Christ.

THE LAW OF SAYING NO. One of the best words in our language is no. Sometimes well-meaning folks want to take away this word because they believe it to be so negative; yet, this word is what helps us to set up boundaries and separate ourselves from others. No--It is a word used to express our boundaries and our will. **This word helps us to realize we do have power and that we are not responsible for others.** This word helps us to differ between what is ours and what is someone else's.

No/I will not/I disagree/stop/It's not okay/etc...

As Christians **we are not doormats** nor are we to be "yes" men to others. We read about if someone slaps you on the one cheek turn and give him the other. We read about if someone asks you for something give him or her more than they asked for. If someone wants a shirt give him/her your coat also. **We come away feeling like we have no say and to say no, would be unchristian.** There are times when we need to do for others but there are times when we don't. There are times when we need to help, lend, give, and times when we shouldn't. Some people find it difficult to say no to anyone, yet, a balanced life will say no and not regret it.

The motivation behind the situation often dictates whether a yes or no is appropriate. When people are in genuine need often yes is appropriate. When people are continuing in their state of codependency saying yes is inappropriate.

FOR EXAMPLE: We have several phones calls a year asking for help to pay bills, provide transportation, give them money, give them food...and the assumption is that the Church should always say yes. The Church becomes known as some place where you can always get help. Certainly that would be good, but the truth is that the Church is not a doormat; it is not a place to take advantage and treat like some unrestricted supply line for anyone anywhere. We don't always help, we don't always say yes, there are strings attached from time to time and quite frankly **we are not responsible for everyone.**

Here is the bottom line on this subject: **We are responsible to people but not for people.** Everyone will have to answer for his or her own decisions and actions. We will only answer for ours. In truth being our brother's keeper does not mean we must provide for them. In love we deal with them, answering needs, providing what we can, but also speaking the truth to them. Each person stands alone before God. Another was of looking at being responsible **to** people, is love your neighbor AS yourself (not before or after).

What does this mean? It means that we can't change others. We can try to influence change, but we only have the actual power to change ourselves by God's help—We are not responsible to take on someone else's responsibility, job, or work. For example: as a pastor it is my responsibility to preach the truth to you, point you in the right direction, teach and train, but none of this happens unless you agree to receive it, do it, and come under authority. I am not responsible for you, you are.

You are responsible to choose.

You are responsible to humble yourself before God

You are responsible to repent

You are responsible to seek God and answers for life

You are responsible to find a place where change can take place...

You are responsible to respect, honor, and be grateful, to show appreciation for what you have been given, We are responsible to love...to examine our own lives...

Boundaries are crossed when we disrespect, dishonor, and are ungrateful. When we don't love others, when we examine others but not ourselves boundaries are broken do—do not judge, lest you be judged.

We are responsible to allow good in and keep the bad out. We are responsible to guard our hearts, and be watchmen over the gates to our heart—such as the ears, eyes, tongue, mind...

I will not answer for you and you will not answer for me; but we do answer to one another.

Scriptural Boundaries:

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.”(Gal. 6:7)

“Walk after the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.”

“Do not be drunk on wine, but being filled with the Spirit; understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:33)

“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:1,2)

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)

Proverbs is an excellent place to begin to understand boundaries and how the world works.

When we cross Spiritual boundaries by practicing sinful behavior we are the ones who are going to smart for it: For anyone who sows to the flesh shall reap death and suffering; but those who sow to the Spirit, life and peace.