

BOUNDARIES: POLITICAL OR PERSONAL?

Critique of *Boundaries*, by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

An increasingly popular "buzzword" among psychologists (and their followers) is "boundaries." This one concept is used to explain and correct a huge range of human behavior. Many popular psychology books have employed this term in recent years. The concept needs to be examined with biblical discernment. A review of the book *Boundaries* is an opportunity to do so, as the authors thoroughly explain what is meant by "boundaries," and how psychologists apply the term to various human relationships.

The task before us is not easy. These authors profess faith in Christ, and they address some very real problems. Their writing is permeated with Scripture references. Sometimes their recommendations appear to be correct on the surface, although the underlying reasoning is questionable. Some of the basic problems encountered can be summarized as follows:

Terminology: The term "boundaries" is one normally applied to political or geographical territories; this is the sole biblical use of the word. It is inappropriate to apply such terminology to personal relationships.

Control: The cover of *Boundaries* counsels you to *take control* of your life, rather than to *submit control* of your life to the sovereign Lord.

Responsibility: "Boundaries" are intended to sort out responsibilities, *for* oneself and *to* others. However, all human beings are responsible *to God*.

Biblically, there are often **mutual** responsibilities. The geographical terminology of "boundaries" does not adequately account for this biblical overlapping of responsibilities.

Persecution for Christ: The Christian is exhorted to be willing to endure hardship and persecution for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although these authors occasionally mention sacrificial love for others, nowhere do they acknowledge the requirement that the believer be ready to joyfully endure suffering for God's kingdom.

Sin vs. "psychological" problem: Just about every conceivable problem in human behavior or attitude seems capable of being explained as some type of "boundary" problem. In every case, *sin* is more basic when the issue is examined biblically. The sin of the human heart is greatly obscured when life's problems are sorted out accordingly to this psychologically contrived category.

Sinner vs. victim: In looking at "boundary" problems and their development in childhood, the person is viewed as more fundamentally a *victim* than a *sinner*. This is a typical error of psychological counseling theories and methods.

Motives: The authors do make some attempts to look biblically at the motives underlying the behaviors that they have defined as "boundary" problems. However, their general focus encourages the inherent self-centered tendencies of the human heart.

Focus on Feelings: Typical of psychology books, these authors place an unbiblical emphasis on emotions.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The view of forgiveness and reconciliation presented in this book differs from what the Bible teaches.

Biblical Exegesis: The "boundary" concept is read *into* the Scriptures that the authors cite in support of their theories. Often, the passages cited have nothing to do with "boundaries" as defined by psychology.

Creator/creature Distinction: "Boundary" theories are applied to God in a way that blurs the clear biblical distinction between the Creator and His creatures. The results are absurd at best.

Each of these objections will be explored in further detail. First, however, we need to examine the extent of the claims made by the authors. A complete doctrine of the nature of man is constructed on the foundation of this one term, "boundaries." It is highly inaccurate to condense so much into one theory, particularly when that theory minimizes the seriousness of human sin.

Too Much!

Counseling issues generally concern interpersonal relationships, one-person behavior patterns, or some combination thereof. The authors claim that "many clinical psychological symptoms...find their root in conflicts with boundaries" (p. 26). They claim to present "a biblical view of boundaries," presupposing "the deeply biblical nature of boundaries" (p. 26).

The opening chapter of *Boundaries* describes a day in the life of a woman who lacks boundaries. Problems include a disobedient son, a withdrawn daughter, an angry husband, a demanding friend, covering for an irresponsible co-worker, a persistent church worker, tardiness at work--in general, a life that seems "out of control." All of these issues are analyzed by the authors as "boundary problems," and their book concludes with a day in the life of the same woman, who has now undergone therapy and established "boundaries" in her life.

Note some of the sweeping generalizations made by the authors:

"More marriages fail because of poor boundaries than for any other reason." (p. 150)

Physical abuse is termed "physical boundary violation."
(p. 159)

"Of all the areas in which boundaries are crucially important, none is more relevant than that of raising children." (p. 168)

"If we teach responsibility, limit setting, and delay of gratification early on, the smoother our children's later years of life will be." (p. 170)

Noting various individual behavioral symptoms, "destructive fruit," the authors make the astounding claim that "all of these symptoms can be related to a difficulty in setting limits on your own behavior." (p. 219)

"Loving God and our neighbor is difficult. One of the main reasons it's so difficult is because of boundary problems, which are essentially problems of responsibility."
(p. 228-9)

Marital turmoil, discipline of children, physical abuse, life-dominating sins, and love for God and others...whatever the problem, these counselors have an explanation rooted in "boundaries." Certainly, the problems noted in the opening story are all very real and pressing. The disobedient son, withdrawn daughter, and the angry husband need attention. The irresponsible co-worker should be confronted in accordance with biblical standards. The demanding friend needs biblical counsel in response to her continual problems. The requests for church volunteer work need to be responded to in terms of biblical priorities. The woman herself needs to examine her own heart and motives in the light of God's standards. She needs to *obey God* in areas where He has given her clear responsibilities, and *trust God* in other areas of concern. Each problem needs a response according to *God's standards*, rather than the man-made standards of psychological counseling. Meanwhile, let us examine these standards in order to understand why and how they deviate from God's Word.

Definitions: Ownership and Responsibility

The authors define "boundaries" primarily in terms of *responsibility*:

"Any confusion of responsibility and ownership in our lives is a problem of boundaries. Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their land, we need to set mental, physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries for our lives to help us distinguish what is our responsibility and what isn't." (p. 25)

It is no wonder that Christians are embracing this concept. Surely it appears as a welcome relief from the deterministic psychology of Freud and others like him. The Bible does emphasize personal responsibilities. Still, there are problems.

"Boundaries" are also used as a manner of defining your own self in contrast to others:

"Boundaries define your soul, and they help you to guard it and maintain it (Proverbs 4:23)." (p. 29)

"Boundaries define us. They define *what is me* and *what is not me*." (p. 29)

Serving a self-protective purpose, "boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out" (p. 31). However, "fences need gates in

them," to let out the sin or pain that is inside (p. 31). Warning that "boundaries are not walls," the authors note that "often, we will close our boundaries to good things from others, staying in a state of deprivation" (p. 32).

The authors mention several specific examples of "boundaries:"

1. Your **physical self**, your skin (p. 33).
2. **Words** such as "no," showing others that "you exist apart from them and that you are in control of you" (p. 34).
3. **"Truth,"** either about God or about yourself (p. 35):

"Many people live scattered and tumultuous lives trying to live outside of their own boundaries, not accepting and expressing the truth of who they are." (p. 35)
4. **Geographical distance**, used to avoid danger, limit evil, or replenish yourself (p. 35).
5. **Time** taken away from a person or project (p. 36).
6. **Emotional distance** as a temporary boundary, particularly where an abusive relationship is involved (p. 36).

Later, we will see how several of these examples highlight the encouragement of man's natural self-centered focus.

Sometimes, the word "boundaries" is nearly synonymous with *laws* or *commandments*. The authors state that Satan "tempted Eve to question God's boundaries" (p. 35). It is God's *commandment* that was questioned and violated in the Garden. It confuses the issue of sin to replace *commandment* with "boundary."

The authors list a number of areas which they claim to be within one's own "boundaries." In view of their general teachings, these are all specific individual areas of responsibility:

1. **Feelings**, which "have gotten a bad rap in the Christian world" but "play an enormous role in our motivation and behavior" (p. 40). According to the authors, feelings "should neither be ignored nor placed in charge" (p. 40). Instead, authors advise that you "own" your feelings and be

aware of them, because "feelings are *your* responsibility" (p. 40).

2. **Attitudes and beliefs**, which the authors say you must "own," concurrently holding others responsible for *their* attitudes and beliefs (p. 40-1).

3. **Behaviors**, which "have consequences."

"The problem comes when someone interrupts the law of sowing and reaping in another's life." (p. 41)

4. **Choices**, which also must be "owned:"

"A common boundary problem is disowning our choices and trying to lay the responsibility for them on someone else." (p. 42)

"We need to realize that we are in control of our choices, no matter how we feel." (p. 42)

"Making decisions based on others' approval or on guilt breeds resentment, a product of our sinful nature." (p. 42)

5. **Values**: The authors state that "often we do not take responsibility for what we value" because of "valuing the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (p. 43). Also, "we think that power, riches, and pleasure will satisfy our deepest longing, which is really for love" (p. 43).

6. **Limits**, including limits on both others and self. The authors base their claims on an analogy with God:

"God sets standards, but He lets people be who they are and then separates Himself from them when they misbehave...God limits His exposure to evil, unrepentant people." (p. 44)

Concerning "internal limits," the authors recommend that you say no to destructive desires, and postpone some good desires. However, they claim that we need "to have spaces inside where we can have a feeling, an impulse, a desire, without acting it out. *We need self-control without repression.*" (p. 44)

7. **Talents** should be "owned" and properly used (p. 44).

8. **Thoughts** also are to be "owned," rather than mechanically following others. The authors recommend learning about God's Word and the world, clarifying distorted thinking, checking where we're wrong, and communicating with others. (p. 45-6)

9. **Desires:** The authors recommend knowing what you truly desire:

"To know what to ask for, we have to be in touch with who we really are and what are our real motives." (p. 47)

"We are commanded to play an active role in seeking our desires." (p. 47, citing Philippians 2:12-13, Ecclesiastes 11:9, and Matthew 7:7-11)

10. **Love:** Calling the heart a "trust muscle" for which we are responsible, the authors claim that you must let love in and also let it out.

There are indeed *some* elements of truth in all of this. People are responsible for their behaviors, choices, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, use of talents, and such. However, the analysis in *Boundaries* lacks a clear view that man is responsible *before God* for all of these areas. He is responsible *before God* for the use of his God-given talents. He is responsible *before God* for his choices and behaviors. He is responsible to think God's thoughts after Him, bringing every thought captive in obedience to Christ. He is responsible for the standards and values established by God in His Word, and certainly, he is to seek the approval of God rather than man. Feelings are not to dominate, but may reveal the condition of the heart and the need for godly change. Man is responsible to love God with all his heart, and to love others as much as he already loves self; this differs subtly from the counsel of the authors noted above. *Desires* are to be brought into line with the will of God, as the Christian no longer lives for himself but rather to please, serve, and glorify God.

Summarizing, then, it is evident that while man has significant responsibilities in the areas discussed, it is fundamental to understand that his responsibility is *to God*, not to self.

Definitions: Boundaries and Self

One chapter of *Boundaries* is specifically devoted to "internal boundary conflicts" and "our responsibility to control our own bodies" (p. 208). A wide spread of behaviors is related to such "boundary conflicts," including eating, money, time management, task completion, sexuality, the tongue, and substance abuse. For example, the eating of "comfort foods" is said to be related to "false boundaries" and "false closeness" (p. 209). Gossip, flattery, seduction, sarcasm, and threats are all activities of the tongue that the authors group with other "boundary conflicts" (p. 212). The emergence of sexual problems, particularly in men, is noted as "Christians are finding more safe places in the church to be honest about spiritual and emotional conflicts" (p. 214). Almost any possible excessive, problematic behavior is thrown into the "boundary conflict" bag.

The authors note the difficulty in saying "no" to oneself. They note that unlike setting boundaries with others, for whom we're not responsible, we are responsible for ourselves and thus the involvement is much greater (p. 215). Also, "we withdraw from relationship when we most need it" (p. 216), due to a combination of pride, shame, and insecurity. This isolation, however, leads to an increase in the struggle at hand. Furthermore, "we try to use willpower to solve our boundary problems" (p. 217), but "willpower alone is helpless against self-boundary struggles" (p. 217). These willful attempts, the authors claim, make an *idol* of the will and lead to rebellion and resentment within "the boundaryless part of the soul" (p. 217). Instead, commitments need to be made in the context of relationship.

All of the problems indicated here are related to a lack of self-control, which biblically is one characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). Each problem here is a *sin problem*, and while the authors do not totally exclude sin from their discussion, the concept is not fundamental. Briefly, the biblical solution for such issues comes under the broad subject of sanctification, as the believer increasingly lives under the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit, knowing that Christ has broken both the penalty *and* power of sin (Romans 6:1-14). The general focus on "boundaries" is misleading, both in looking at root causes (sin within the heart) and solutions rooted in the power of God's Spirit.

Boundary Development

The authors describe the development of "boundaries" from infancy on, focusing on processes of both attachment and separation. They state that boundaries are not inherited, but built over a period of years. The process is ongoing, but most crucial in early childhood when character is formed (p. 62).

Genesis 2:18 is cited as the basis for claiming that "our deepest need is to belong" (p. 64). The authors believe that God had more in mind than marital companionship when He created Eve as a helper for Adam. They see attachment needs as critical:

"Attachment is the foundation of the soul's existence. When this foundation is cracked or faulty, boundaries become impossible to develop." (p. 64)

Only in relationship with God and others can boundaries be properly developed (p. 64). The authors describe an infant's need "to bond with mom and dad" (p. 64). They call this "object constancy," citing Ephesians 3:17 and Colossians 2:27 (p. 65). They move on to describe the small child's separation, his "need for autonomy, or independence," which emerges a little later (p. 66). In his childish sense of omnipotence, the child begins to experiment in all directions. Later he begins to acknowledge his limits, returning to a connection with his mother. During this time, "the word *no* helps children separate from what they don't like...it gives them the power to make choices" (p. 71). In stressing separation as well as attachment, the authors state that "you must first determine who you *aren't* before you discover the true, authentic aspects of your God-given identity" (p. 66).

Although much of this may sound logical and well-balanced, it is crucial to note man's separation *from God* due to his sin, and his basic need for reconciliation with his Creator, accomplished only through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Man's fundamental sin problem is due to his desire for autonomy and independence. The verses cited in support of "object constancy," Ephesians 3:17 and Colossians 2:27, are concerned with being "rooted and grounded" in the love of *Christ*, not the love of a human mother. Parents do have serious responsibilities *before God* for their children, but "object constancy" does not equal being rooted and grounded in God's love. The authors' analysis of "boundary development" does not adequately consider man's separation from God and rebellious attempt at autonomy.

Boundary Problems

The authors note four primary styles of relating which indicate a "boundary" problem:

1. **Compliant:** This individual says yes even to what is bad, fails to recognize evil, and may remain in an abusive relationship due to various fears and guilt. He complies outwardly while inwardly resentful. (p. 49-51)
2. **Avoidant:** This person says no to what is good, is unable to ask for help or allow other in. He cannot recognize his own needs, instead considering even legitimate problems and needs as bad. The authors claim that *even God* allows us to either let Him in or out. (A full critique of this claim is beyond the scope of this paper, but such a view places man in an autonomous position above God's sovereignty, and that is biblically wrong.) (p. 52-3)
3. **Controller:** Refusing to respect the "boundaries" of others or to take proper responsibility for his own life, this person controls, abuses, and manipulates others, sending guilt messages and expecting something in return when he does something for another. He fears abandonment if he ceases to control and manipulate in this manner. (p. 53-57)
4. **Nonresponsive:** This person either fails to hear the needs of others, or criticizes such needs. He is too self-absorbed to demonstrate responsibility to others, but rather excludes them. The authors warn not to "confuse this self-absorption with a God-given sense of taking responsibility for one's own needs first so that one is able to love others" (p. 58).

Some "controlling nonresponsives...see others as responsible for their struggles and are on the lookout for someone to take care of them" (p. 59)

Each description noted above is laced with sin problems, and each of these problems is addressed *sufficiently* in Scripture. Every one of these behaviors is in some way a failure to love God wholeheartedly, and love others as oneself. (The warning about "self-absorption" is inadequate; see "The Bread of Life," a critique which biblically demonstrates the fallacy of putting one's own needs *first*.)

Specific Applications

The authors apply their theory of "boundaries" to every conceivable type of human relationship, including marriage, children, family in general, work, friends, romances. We need to briefly review their applications, and recognize that all of these interpersonal struggles have biblical explanations rooted in sin, and biblical answers.

Family. The authors make the sweeping statement that:

"One sure sign of boundary problems is when your relationship with one person has the power to affect your relationships with others." (p. 124)

Examples of such "boundary problems" are abundant:

1. A spouse who has failed to properly separate from his family of origin (p. 125).
2. A young adult who remains financially dependent on his parents (p. 126).
3. An adult who remains a "perpetual child" in an "enmeshed family" where everyone appears to get along well, but *other* adult relationships are "dysfunctional" (p. 127).
4. Triangulation, where two persons have a conflict and each of them confides in the same third party, who ought not to be involved at all (p. 127-8).
5. Children who are expected to be overly responsible for their parents in some way (p. 129).
6. An adult remains irresponsible by depending on a more responsible brother or sister (p. 130).

The authors state that "one step in growing up is coming out from under parental authority and putting yourself under God's authority" (p. 131). They recommend that you ask whether ties with your family of origin hinder you from doing the right thing, and whether you have truly become an adult in relation to that original family (p. 132).

Real problems are certainly identified here. Adults (children, too) are responsible to God and are under His

authority. However, every problem described in this list can be addressed biblically, and without any reference to "boundaries." There are clear responsibilities before God, spelled out in His Word, which determine the proper solutions for these situations.

Marriage. The author note the great potential for confusion in this area, since God designed husband and wife to "become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31) (p. 150). They note the fact that marriage is a mirror of Christ and the church, where:

"Christ has some things that only He can do, the church has some things that only it can do, and they have some things they do together." (p. 150)

Problems occur when:

"...one trespasses on the other's personhood, when one crosses a line and tries to control the feelings, attitudes, behaviors, choices, and values of the other." (p. 151)

Feelings are stressed, including the importance of communication, as well as taking responsibility for one's own emotional responses (p. 151). Feelings are seen as "a warning signal telling us that we need to do something" (p. 151). Similarly, "desires are another element of personhood that each spouse needs to take responsibility for" (p. 152). They stress individual responsibility here:

"The problem lies in who is responsible for the want. It is your want, not his. You are responsible for getting it fulfilled." (p. 153)

"Often spouses will do more than they really want to and then resent the other for not stopping them from overgiving." (p. 154)

"Taking responsibility for someone's anger, pouting, and disappointments by giving in to that person's demands or controlling behavior destroys love in a marriage." (p. 156)

Unfortunately, this discussion does not adequately recognize the biblical demand to care for the other spouse *ahead of self*, to sacrificially love that other person. Although appearing to promote responsibility, the counsel just noted feeds into the inherent tendency of the human heart to put *self* first.

The same type of error arises when the authors recommend physical space for "nourishment" or for "limit setting" (p. 159). They further recommend "emotional distance" if your spouse has had an affair and you need time to trust him again (p. 159). In addition, they claim, "each spouse needs time apart from the relationship for self-nourishment" (p. 159). It is incredibly easy to twist this into an excuse for selfish motivations. Spouse do sometimes have individual interests and friends; they do not spend 24 hours every day in exactly the same place. However, these authors, with their "boundary" teachings, cultivate the natural selfishness of the human heart, and they fail to adequately consider the "one-flesh" teachings of Scripture.

The issue of biblical submission compounds the problem. Using a questionable exegesis which ignores the context, they cite Ephesians 5:21 as teaching that "both husbands and wives are supposed to practice submission, not just wives" (p. 160). Glossing over God's clear *command*, they reduce submission to a *choice*:

"Submission is always the free choice of one party to another. Wives choose to submit to their husbands, and husbands choose to submit to their wives." (p. 160)

They do rightly note that the husband's duty to love his wife as Christ loved the church (p. 161). *Slave-like* submission is a sinful distortion of God's Word. However, their analysis of submission problems is one-sided:

"We have never seen a 'submission problem' that did not have a controlling husband at its root." (p. 161-2)

While it is true that husbands may wrongly use the Scriptures in this area, not *all* problems of submission are rooted in "controlling husbands." This overlooks the natural tendency of the human heart to rebel against God-ordained authority. Wives, too, have their part in "submission problems," though the problem may indeed involve a sinful attitude in the husband.

Generally, the "boundary" concept is highly misleading and unbiblical in solving the problems of marital relationships.

Children. The authors basically substitute "boundaries" for the biblical concept of discipline. They equate "boundary development" with parental discipline (Ephesians 6:4), stating that "we teach them autonomy" (p. 170). They explain that "discipline is an external boundary, designed to develop internal

boundaries in our children" (p. 171). The goal here is "an internal sense of motivation, with self-induced consequences" (p. 172). The authors distinguish such discipline from punishment, which is "payment for wrongdoing" which "does not leave much room for mistakes" (p. 171). Punishment looks backward to the wrong, while discipline looks forward and seeks to develop self-protection (p. 173-5), responsibility for one's own needs (p. 175-7), ability to delay gratification (p. 181-2), and respect for the boundaries of others (p. 182-3), along with the ability to "filter out our needs from those of others" (p. 177).

Specific recommendations are strongly centered in emotion. The authors counsel parents to allow their children to talk about their anger, express grief or sadness, ask questions, and put their feelings into words (p. 177). These actions are not necessarily wrong, so long as biblical principles of behavior are maintained, but the feeling focus is unbalanced. Biblically, however, parents must instruct their children in obedience to *God's laws*, and teach them to examine their hearts using God's Word. "Boundaries" is not a helpful concept in accomplishing this task.

Friends. Beginning with the categories of compliant, aggressive, controller, and nonresponsive outlined earlier, the authors put together several combinations of these patterns to illustrate the friendship problems that can result from a lack of "boundaries." They define friendship as "a nonromantic relationship that is attachment-based rather than function-based" (p. 134). Although friendship has "no external commitment" as does marriage, "choice and commitment are elements of a good friendship" (p. 144). The authors state that friendships should be based on attachment rather than obligation:

"The only thing that will keep them calling, spending time with us, and putting up with us is love. And that's the one thing we can't control." (p. 146)

One of the major problems with their analysis is that biblically, we must be willing to extend love and friendship to people who need it, and this is an *obligation* to be fulfilled out of our love for the Lord. In friendships, as in other human relationships, the Christian is called to love God with all his heart, soul, and strength, and to love others as he already loves himself. The boundary-tainted analysis simply doesn't focus on God's command. Too often, these authors recommend that friends separate, or that one threatens to end the relationship. Their counsel ignores much

biblical teaching about requirements to initiate reconciliation, regardless of who is at fault.

Romantic Relationships. The authors note the risky nature of romantic friendships (p. 146), the purpose of which is to practice and experiment for the possibility of marriage (p. 146-7). There is much potential here for conflict, and a need for honesty and limits (p. 147). The authors state that:

"No one can become a truly biblical adult without setting some limits, leaving home, and cleaving somewhere else."
(p. 148)

To be sure, the Bible calls for "leaving and cleaving" at the time of marriage. Indeed, there is risk and potential conflict in dating. However, "boundaries" is not a concept that adequately deals with the complexities and biblical requirements of this type of relationship. At this point, we have an opportunity to see how the "boundary" concept may lead to the right action for the wrong reason. In a pre-marital romance, there should be no sexual contact. Although the authors do not mention this fact, the Bible does. Their analysis, were they to mention premarital sex, would undoubtedly focus on "setting boundaries." While their answer (sexual abstinence) would be correct, the *reasoning* fails to acknowledge the commandment of God to reserve sex for marriage. This same type of discernment is essential in examining all that these psychological authors have to say about "boundary setting." It is important to follow *God's commands* and to do so for the right reasons.

Work. The authors trace work problems, correctly, back to the Fall. They note that "work existed before the Fall," but "our difficulties with work came later" (p. 193). They explain such tendencies as the "tendency toward disownership" and blame-shifting behavior of Adam and Eve (p. 193). Also, "the Fall divided love from work" (p. 194). A wide range of work problems are defined and, as you might by now expect, diagnosed as "boundary" problems:

1. "Getting saddled with another person's responsibilities" (p. 195-7) is one problem:

"If you are being saddled with another person's responsibilities and feel resentful, you need to take responsibility for your feelings, and realize that your unhappiness is not your co-worker's fault, but your

own." (p. 195). However, "it is perfectly legitimate to bail out a responsible co-worker" (p. 197).

2. "Working too much overtime" (p. 197-9) is also noted, with the recommendation that you "stop being a victim of an abusive situation and start setting some limits" (p. 199)

3. If your problem is "misplaced priorities" (p. 199-201), the authors counsel you to decide how much time and energy you have, and then manage it.

4. "Difficult co-workers" may be the culprit:

"You only have the power to change yourself. You can't change another person. You must see yourself as the problem, not the other person." (p. 201)

Authors recommend that you focus on changing yourself and your reaction to these problem people.

5. Similarly, the "critical attitudes" of other people may cause work-related difficulties:

"Allow these critical people to be who they are, but keep yourself separate from them and do not internalize their opinion of you." (p. 202)

"You may also want to confront the overly critical person according to the biblical model (Matthew 18)." (p. 202)

"Avoid trying to gain the approval of this sort of person...and avoid getting in arguments and discussions." (p. 202)

"Stay separate. Keep your boundaries. Don't get sucked into their game." (p. 202)

6. "Conflicts with authority" may develop due to "transference feelings" (p. 202) based on "unresolved hurt from past authority relationships" (p. 203). Old patterns may be acted out, patterns that developed in childhood with parents and/or siblings.

7. "Expecting too much from work," such as the need for support and emotional repair, leads to problems:

"People increasingly come to the workplace wanting the company to be a 'family.'" (p. 203)

"You need to make sure you are meeting your needs for support and emotional repair outside of work." (p. 204)

"Keep your boundaries firm; protect those hurt places from the workplace, which is not only not set up to heal, but also may wound unintentionally." (p. 204)

8. "Taking work-related stress home" is another danger:

"Conflicts at work need to be dealt with and worked through so they do not begin to affect the rest of your life." (p. 205)

"Make sure that the job, which is literally never done, does not continue to spill over into personal life and cost you relationships and other things that matter." (p. 205)

9. You will also have work problems if you dislike your job:

"Many people are unable to ever find a true work identity.... They have not been able to own their own gifts, talents, wants, desires, and dreams because they are unable to set boundaries on others' definitions and expectations of them." (p. 205-6)

"First you need to firmly establish your identity, separating yourself from those you are attached to and following your desires." (p. 206)

There are many valid problems described here, but the issues are not merely a matter of "setting boundaries." Biblical *priorities* to God, family, and others are necessary. Properly sorting work responsibilities, and faithfully performing one's employment duties, is certainly biblical. Some of the problems with other people noted here are problems that occur in numerous other relationships as well. Biblical methods of reconciliation need to be followed. It is important to note here that the process in Matthew 18 is not *optional*, as the authors imply, but it does pertain to *church discipline* specifically. The first two steps can and ought to be utilized in any setting, but the full process is one that applies only within the church. The authors gloss over this important teaching.

As with all of the other areas examined, the problems outlined are ones that have biblical explanations and solutions, apart from any reference to "boundaries."

Resolution. In all of these human relationships, the authors recommend that you identify "specific boundary problems" after you have identified the presenting symptoms. Then, they ask that you see the origin of your current conflict in "original issues" with your parents (p. 164). They counsel you to "stand up to abuse" and to "say no to unreasonable demands" (p. 165). Summarizing the purpose, they say:

"When you are in control of yourself, you can give and sacrifice for loved ones in a helpful way instead of giving in to destructive behavior and self-centeredness." (p165)

First, it is unbiblical to see such a wide range of interpersonal conflicts in terms of this one concept, "boundaries." Second, while certainly *patterns of response* may develop in childhood, too much stress is placed here (and elsewhere) on parental abuses as the ultimate *cause* of present behaviors. Finally, although we can agree *for biblical reasons* not to give in to destructive (sinful) behavior, these authors are too insistent on a self-first attitude. It may or may not be appropriate to "stand up to abuse," or to "say no to unreasonable demands," depending on the specific circumstances and *what is most glorifying to God*. At times, abuse must be endured to take a stand for the cause of Christ. Other times, for the welfare of the other person, it is right to say no. The *focus* of this book is what lacks biblical truth.

Victim or Sinner...Psychological Problem or Sin?

A key issue throughout this book, and so many others flooding today's market, is whether man is fundamentally a victim or a sinner. The "boundary" concept leans heavily toward viewing man as more basically a *victim* who is entitled to protect himself from further harm. In discussing the development of boundaries in childhood, the authors state that:

"God's desire is for you to know where your injuries and deficits are, whether self-induced or other-induced." (p. 62)

While there is *some* attempt to acknowledge personal sin, the emphasis is placed on *injuries*, thus implying that you are more a victim, an *injured* person, than someone who is responsible *before*

God. The authors see such injuries as rooted in "boundary" problems: "Having inappropriate boundaries set on us can injure us, especially in childhood" (p. 116). On both sides, sin is obscured by coloring sinful patterns with "boundary" related terms.

Ignorance. This erroneous view of man also appears when the authors state that people "raised in dysfunctional families" have never learned the "spiritual principles that...govern their relationships and well-being," and therefore they hurt and end up in trouble, "prisoners of their own ignorance" (p. 84). Here we observe *ignorance* replacing the *willful*, responsible nature of sinful responses that is taught in Scripture.

Self-Boundaries. Earlier we looked at the wide range of individual *sinful* behaviors that the authors link with an inability to say no to oneself. It is in examining this area that the view of man as a victim is particularly glaring. The authors do recommend that you look at your own sin, the sins of others against you, and significant relationships that contribute to your problem (p. 219). However, their focus is emphatically on the sins of *others*. They list all of the following as possible "roots" of sinful behavior patterns: lack of training (p. 219), rewarded destructiveness (p. 219), distorted need (p. 220), fear of relationship (p. 220), unmet emotional hungers (p. 220), legalistic environments (p. 220), and the covering of emotional hurt (p. 220). This is an elaborate, subtle, seemingly "professional" manner of shifting blame, despite the occasional encouragement to examine your own sin.

The authors see victimization, at least in this book, in terms of "boundary" issues:

"Establishing boundaries for yourself is always hard. It will be especially difficult if your boundaries were severely violated in childhood." (p. 226)

This obscures the seriousness of real sin committed against children, calling it "boundary violation," as well as current sin, calling it a failure to "establish boundaries for yourself."

Past Abuse and Trust. The authors see a huge amount of damage from abuse, and they offer little hope apart from "professional" help, such as the services they offer for a substantial fee:

"The victim loses a sense of trust...our ability to trust ourselves is based on our experience of others as trustworthy." (p. 227)

"Victims often lose a sense of trust because the perpetrator was someone they knew as children, someone who was important to them." (p. 227)

"Another damaging effect of abuse or molestation is the destruction of a sense of ownership over the victim's soul." (p. 227)

"Another injury due to victimization is a deep, pervasive sense of being 'all-bad,' wrong, dirty, or shameful." (p. 227)

"In many cases the severe nature of the trauma is such that the victim will be unable to set boundaries without professional help." (p. 227)

Where does the Bible say that we are to *trust ourselves*, something the authors believe to have been damaged? Where is the sense in all this of *God's faithfulness*, and that failure to trust Him is biblically considered *sin*? Where does Scripture ever state that we have any right to "ownership" of our souls? (It states exactly the opposite: *You were bought at a price by the blood of Christ!*) Considering the extent of sin, what is so disastrous about seeing oneself as totally depraved? Why should "setting boundaries" be the hallmark of Christianity maturity? Finally, how can these authors, or anyone else, make such glowing claims about "professional" help, based as it is on theories that define man wholly in terms of a presumption of atheism? Hopefully, these rhetorical questions will help us to focus on the unbiblical nature of this book and its teachings. There is certainly no intent here to minimize real abuse, or to lack compassion. However, a truly biblical view of the issues involved is far more compassionate and offers infinitely more *hope* to those who have been grievously sinned against.

Anger. The view of anger presented in this book also points to a flawed view of man as the victim. The authors claim that when a person initially sets boundaries, he may become angry. However, "anger tells us that our boundaries have been violated," thus serving as a warning system "telling us we're in danger of being injured or controlled" (p. 112). When boundaries are first set, "old anger" may arise, generated through "years of constant

boundary violations," and the person may need to "catch up" with his anger (p. 113). The authors see anger as highly useful:

"Anger also provides us with a sense of power to solve a problem. It energizes us to protect ourselves, those we love, and our principles." (p. 113)

There is, biblically, the possibility of righteous anger that does not lead to sin. However, these statements imply a view of man's nature that is far too generous. Human anger, more often than not, leads to sin. Anger is more a warning system about the condition of one's heart, than about the outside dangers noted by the authors. Again, too, man is seen as a victim, with "old anger" arising to haunt him due to previous "boundary violations." Man does indeed hold anger and bitterness in his heart at times, but there is a need for *repentance*, something the authors do not properly acknowledge. Anger must *not* be used to give a sense of power! That is a dangerous path for sinful man to follow. Rather, we are exhorted to make room for *God's wrath*, and leave vengeance in His hands.

Anger in others is also examined, in the context of responding to the resistance encountered when first setting boundaries:

"If angry people can make you lose your boundaries, you probably have an angry person in your head that you still fear. You will need to work through some of the hurt you experienced in that angry past." (p. 257)

"Begin to recognize the person in your head that the angry person represents." (p. 257)

There are valid biblical reasons to face the past honestly, such as examining one's own sinful response, and sometimes restoring another person entangled in sin. However, these quotes reflect again the tendency to thrust blame somewhere other than one's own sinful heart.

Unmet developmental needs. Also in the context of setting "boundaries" with others, the authors trace internal resistance to "unmet developmental needs" (p. 253). This reflects the need-based view of man that permeates most psychology books today. Again, such emphasis on *need*, with no scriptural basis, focuses on man as a victim rather than a sinner.

Guilt. Looking further at obstacles to setting boundaries with others, the authors discuss the role of guilt, which they define as follows:

"Guilt is a difficult emotion, for it is really not a true feeling, such as sadness, anger, or fear. It is a state of internal condemnation. It is the punitive nature of our fallen conscience saying, 'You are bad.'" (p. 264)

"Biblically, it is something legal, not emotional." (p. 264)

"Our guilt feelings are not inerrant. They can appear when we have not done anything wrong at all, but have violated some internal standard that we have been taught." (p. 265)

"Our fallen consciences can tell us that we are bad or doing something mean when we set boundaries." (p. 265)

"Guilt will keep you from doing what is right and will keep you stuck. Many people do not have good boundaries because they are afraid of disobeying the internal parent inside their heads." (p. 265)

There is one correct statement here, and that is that guilt is *not emotional, but legal*. Guilt is concerned with the violation of God's standards, as given authoritatively in His Word. However, the authors move right back into their emotion-laden definitions. In doing so, they are not looking at the real issues of the heart, the *idols* of the human heart that undergird so much behavior. One such idol is the approval of man. It is not so much an "internal standard that we have been taught" or "the internal parent inside the head," but the excessive, idolatrous desires of the heart that drive sinful behavior. Note, too, that the "fallen conscience" does not so much *condemn* as it *excuses* and holds down the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18ff). Man constantly seeks to escape his own sin and the righteous judgment of God, in contrast with the views promoted by psychological counseling.

The authors counsel that you must "learn new information for your conscience" and "acquire guilt...disobey your parental conscience" (p. 266). They also state that "guilt should not be a motivator of our behavior...we are to be motivated by love" (p. 265). Certainly, the believer must be immersed in God's Word and learn His standards in order to avoid sinning against Him. We can also agree that love is to motivate our behavior, although there is also a reverential fear of the Lord that is closely correlated with love for God in the Scriptures. However, the counsel to

"acquire guilt" by disobedience to your "parental conscience" lacks any biblical foundation. It is confusing and misleading to speak of *guilt* in this manner. Rather, the Christian must continually look to the standards of God's Word. He must examine his own personal standards, whether acquired from parents or otherwise, to compare them with what God requires. Guilt should be defined in biblical terms and not entangled with unscriptural, psychologized definitions.

Boundary "Injuries." As we have seen, this book regards man as fundamentally injured and victimized by the sins of others. His sinful behavior is viewed in psychologized terms which cloud the seriousness of sin. It is particularly revealing to note the authors' specific views of how "boundaries" are injured in childhood. They list several possibilities:

1. **Withdrawal:** This occurs when parents withdraw love from a child, using "spiritual and emotional blackmail" (p. 75), so as to "make the child responsible for the emotional health of the parent" (p. 75). The child's natural "omnipotence...plays right into boundary injury" (p. 75). The terrified child withdraws and attempts to comply out of fear.

2. **Hostility:** Here the parent is hostile to the likes and dislikes ("boundaries") of the child, attempting to make the child *like* doing what the parent commands (p. 76). The authors suggest that this teaches the child to be a people-pleaser, and they recommend instead that the parent give the child a choice as to "how much pain he is willing to endure to be disobedient" (p. 77).

3. **Overcontrol:** In this case, the parents control to such an extent that the child has no chance to make mistakes and learn from them. As a result:

"Overcontrolled children are subject to dependency, enmeshment conflicts, and difficulty setting and keeping firm boundaries." (p. 78)

4. **Lack of limits (p. 79):** Parents fail to discipline, and the child grows up expecting the world to cater to him. He has difficulty hearing the "boundaries" and needs of others.

5. **Inconsistent limits:** Conflicting messages are given to the child. This is frequent in homes where there is drunkenness, with the result that:

"Adult children of alcoholics never feel safe in relationships." (p. 80)

"Setting limits is traumatic for adult children of alcoholics. Saying no might bring respect, or it might bring rage." (p. 80)

6. **Trauma (p. 80-81):** Included here are physical sexual, or emotional abuse, along with losses through death, divorce, or financial hardship. The child grows up without confidence that the world is a safe place, and lacking belief that he is in control of his own life.

7. **Character traits (p. 82):** Focusing now on the individual who is "injured," the authors say that his own "individual character style" contributes to his specific behavior patterns. For example, some people are confrontational and aggressive, while others are shy.

Note, in every case, that the actions of the parents are said to have a profound impact on the behavior of the *adult* child. The second pattern noted, hostility toward the child's "boundaries," is claimed to be responsible for the way many Christians fear an angry God even though they read about His love (p. 77). Scripture does not support the view that a person's view of God depends upon his relationship with earthly parents. *That view arises from the teachings of Freud, an aggressive atheist who claimed that "god" is only a projection of the father.* We cannot accept the determinism of the authors here.

Tacked onto the end of this list of "boundary injuries" is one statement that comes much closer to biblical truth. The authors acknowledge here, at least briefly, that *our own sin* does have some part in the development of our behavior patterns:

"We also contribute to our own boundary development problems by our own depravity. Depravity is what we inherited from Adam and Eve. It is our resistance to being creatures under God, our resistance to humility. It's a refusal to accept our position, and a lust for being omnipotent and 'in charge,' not needing anyone and not accountable to anyone. Our depravity enslaves us to the law of sin and death, from which only Christ can save us (Romans 8:2)." (p. 82)

This statement is a bright light buried in teachings that otherwise obscure the seriousness of sin. It is unfortunate that this recognition of depravity is not *fundamental* to the book, which distorts the truth about the nature of man as a sinner.

Responsibility

The authors of *Boundaries* appear to stress responsibility throughout their writing, even though they miss the mark in emphasizing the sins of others. They note, correctly, that God has given us stewardship, "responsibility within limits" (p. 33). We are to "*give to needs and put limits on sin*" (p. 87), and the authors claim that setting "boundaries" helps us to accomplish this. Responsibility is said to be *to others*, but *for ourselves*, showing the sacrificial love of Christ by doing for others what they *cannot* do for themselves (p. 30). Much is made of a supposed distinction between two Greek words for "burden" in Galatians 6:1-5, with the word in verse 2 supposedly much stronger than the one used in verse 5:

"Problems arise when people act as if their 'boulders' are daily loads, and refuse help, or act as if their 'daily loads' are boulders they shouldn't have to carry. The results of these two instances are either perpetual pain or irresponsibility." (p. 30-31)

Boundaries are best formed, they teach, by being "active and assertive," rather than passive:

"Passivity can become an ally of evil by not pushing against it. Passivity never pays off. God will match our effort, but He will never do our work for us. That would be an invasion of our boundaries." (p. 99)

Also emphasized is what the authors call "the law of sowing and reaping" (p. 84-86). They state that "when God tells us that we will reap what we sow, He is not punishing us; He's telling us how things really are" (p. 84). Problems arise when people are rescued from the natural consequences of their behavior by a person ("codependent") who intervenes and reaps the consequences, enabling him to continue on his path of irresponsibility (p. 85). The authors warn that "confronting an irresponsible person is not painful to him; only consequences are" (p. 85). Thus, "codependent people bring insults and pain onto themselves when they confront irresponsible people." Elsewhere they recommend

confrontation, but it is a confrontation focused on the *feelings* of the injured person, rather than the welfare of the other:

"We cause pain by making choices that others do not like, but we also cause pain by confronting people when they are wrong. But if we do not share our anger with another, bitterness and hatred can set it." (p. 94)

Responsibility is an important issue in Christian growth. Scripture, to be sure, stresses the responsibility of each person *before God*. Note closely the phrase, *before God*. Psychologists often see man as more fundamentally a victim than a sinner, yet sometimes responsibility is seemingly highlighted. The authors claim to be sorting out responsibilities biblically when they teach "setting boundaries." However, the responsibility they stress apparently exists in a void. It comes across as a responsibility focused on *self* rather than on serving and pleasing God. Sometimes the results are similar, but there are glaring differences when we carefully examine the call of Christ. Man's responsibility is *before and to God*, not self. Sometimes, indeed, that means confronting the sin of another person in love, refusing to fear the angry response of that person. Other times, it means submitting to persecution, as Christ submitted Himself to death on the cross:

"When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23)

Thus, the authors' counsel to be "active and assertive" is not well grounded in Scripture, although there are many occasions when activity is needed.

One such occasion is the loving confrontation of sin, clearly covered in Scripture. The classic passage on church discipline, Matthew 18:15-20, outlines the procedure for doing so. There is no hint here of making a distinction between someone who is "irresponsible" and someone who is not; recall that the authors advise the "codependent" not to confront an irresponsible person. Certainly, God exhorts the believer not to share in the sin of another person, but to lovingly rebuke and call him to repentance. Often God teaches and disciplines His children through the consequences (reaping/sowing) of their sin, and it is biblically correct not to interfere with His work. Beyond that, however, Christians are *commanded*, in Galatians 6:1-5, to restore a brother who is caught in sin. This is the passage where the authors make so much of a supposed distinction between the word for "burden" in

verse 2, which they call a "boulder," and the word in verse 5, which they consider somewhat lighter, a "knapsack." There are problems with their exegesis of these verses. First, they fail to recognize that this passage concerns a brother *caught in sin*, not merely any person who has a heavy burden to bear. Furthermore, their analysis of the Greek words is not supported by research in the lexicons. Verse 2 uses *baros*, noted in Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon* as the burden of temptation. It has the connotation of heavy weight. In verse 5 Paul chooses *phortion*, used literally for the cargo of a ship, and figuratively for an oppressive burden, here as well as in Matthew 11:30, Matthew 23:4, and Luke 11:46. In these last two references, it denotes the burden of the law that the Pharisees pressed upon the Jewish people in an oppressive manner. There is no indication that the word is used for a light "knapsack," as the authors claim. They have abused the original biblical language here to impose their own psychologized views on the Scripture.

In summary, the perspective on responsibility presented in *Boundaries* is biblically inadequate, failing to center the concept in God and the standards of His Word.

Selfish Motivations

One of the most serious problems with "boundaries" is that this teaching encourages the inherent self-focus of human nature. There is *much* to be said on this matter.

The authors express their concern that:

"Many people are told over and over again that nurturing and maintaining their souls is selfish and wrong." (p. 275)

"For years, Christians have been taught that protecting their spiritual and emotional property is selfish. Yet God is interested in people loving others, and you can't love others unless you have received love inside yourself." (p. 276-7)

They are further concerned that "boundary-injured individuals make promises" and then either "resentfully make good" or "fail on the promise" (p. 284):

"Following up on guilt-ridden or compliant responsibilities can be quite costly, painful, and inconvenient." (p. 284)

These quotations raise questions that urgently need to be addressed in this section. How much self-care is responsible

stewardship, and at what point does it cross over into selfishness? Is it biblically true that we need to receive love inside ourselves before we can love others, and if so, how is that accomplished? Is it so terribly wrong to experience cost, pain, and inconvenience? Does it, perhaps, depend on one's *motives*, and whether or not the cause of Christ is ultimately served by that sacrifice?

We need to look a number of issues here: the distances between self and others established by "boundaries," motives for setting "boundaries," the legitimacy of pursuing "needs," the "ownership" of self, sin, anger, proper service to others, and the authors' underlying view of the nature of man that is *assumed*.

Distances. The authors make several different recommendations about distances to be kept from others, including geographical distance, time, and emotional distance:

"The Bible urges us to separate from those who continue to hurt us and to create a safe place for ourselves." (p. 35)

"Taking time off from a person, or a project, can be a way of regaining ownership over some out-of-control aspect of your life where boundaries need to be set." (p. 36)

"Emotional distance is a temporary boundary to give your heart the space it needs to be safe; it is never a permanent way of living." (p. 36)

"If you have been in an abusive relationship, you should wait until it is safe and until real patterns of change have been demonstrated before you go back." (p. 36)

"When you are in the beginning stages of recovery, you need to avoid people who have abused and controlled you in the past."
(p. 134)

"Be careful to not get sucked into a controlling situation again because your wish for reconciliation is so strong."
(p. 134)

Where can any of this be found in Scripture? It cannot. These recommendations are rooted in self-protective motivations that defy the thrust of Scripture concerning our love for God and others. The believer must rely on *God's care*, and he must step out boldly to help restore others who have sinned against him.

"Need" theology. Much of the authors' teaching about "boundaries" is based on the *assumption* that there are critical emotional *needs* that absolutely must be met, and that such unmet "needs" are the driving force behind much sinful behavior:

"You do not act in inappropriate ways for no reason. You are often trying to meet some underlying need that your family of origin did not meet.... It is not enough to understand your need. *You must get it met.*" (p. 133)

When the authors examine "boundary" problems in the work setting, they note that "the job expects adult functioning" but often "the person wants childhood needs met" and thus "these differing expectations will inevitably collide" (p. 204). While they are correct about the necessity of adult functioning in employment, they also *assume* that you ought to pursue your childhood needs, as long as you do it off the job:

"You need to make sure you are meeting your needs for support and emotional repair outside of work." (p. 204)

Biblically, this is an inappropriate focus. You ought to be pursuing the glory of God and living to please and serve Him rather than self.

The same need-centered focus is encountered when the authors discuss "self-boundaries" and counsel you to:

"Address your real need. Often, out-of-control patterns disguise a need for someone else." (p. 222)

Biblically, we must disagree. Sinful patterns should be examined under the searchlight of Scripture, looking for the idolatrous desires of the heart that underlie behavior. Instead of "address your real need," we might say, "examine your real desire, or idol."

Ownership and sense of self. Supposedly, the authors' concept of "ownership" is grounded in God-given stewardship. In discussing early childhood development, they note the prevalence of "mine, my and me" in the vocabulary of toddlers, claiming that many Christians wrongly consider that to be selfish. While admitting that "the child's newfound fondness for 'mine' does have roots in our innate self-centeredness," they go on to say that "this simplistic understanding of our character doesn't take into

consideration the full picture of what being in the image of God truly is" (p. 71):

"Without a 'mine,' we have no sense of responsibility to develop, nurture, and protect these resources." (p. 71)

"With correct biblical parenting, they'll learn sacrifice and develop a giving, loving heart, but not until they have a personality that has been loved enough to give love away: 'We love because He first loved us' (1 John 4:19)." (p. 71)

"Children need a sense that their lives, their destinies are largely theirs to determine, within the province of God's sovereignty." (p. 180)

In spite of admissions concerning innate self-centeredness, there is grave error here. The believer must know that he is *bought at a price with the blood of Christ*. A better word than "mine" is "God's." The human heart is naturally in rebellion against God. Sin is rooted in the rebellious desire for autonomy. Man's "declaration of independence" leads him to say "mine," along with the toddler. The believer belongs wholly to God--heart, mind, soul, possessions, time, money--the whole life. There ought be no sense of "ownership" here. The life of the Christian is *not* largely his to determine, even though God may graciously allow some choices between equally legitimate biblical options. Even though the authors note that children "need to know that the world doesn't revolve around them" (p. 182), too much of their teaching leads to just that type of result--a person whose world revolves around himself and his "needs," rather than living for God's glory. The authors believe that discipline helps children to make good choices *for their own benefit*, and to *increase control over their own lives* (p. 192), but again, this merely encourages the sinful tendencies inherent in the human heart.

The Scripture cited in 1 John 4:19 references the love God demonstrated on the cross, not parental love in childhood. It underscores the fact that all believers have *already received* God's love in abundance, and this is sufficient basis for them to demonstrate their grateful love to God, and sacrificial love to others. There is no further requirement to pursue "unmet developmental needs" for love.

Concerning one's "sense of self," the authors state that "what is real and true about us comes from our significant, primary relationships," and thus some adults are "not yet able to shake a deep sense of being worthless and unlovable" (p. 275).

This is not true. What is "real and true about us" comes not from any man, but from the Word of God. No one truly hates himself (Ephesians 5:29), but loves, nourishes, and cherishes himself, despite human appearances. This type of teaching is deceitful and blocks growth in Christ.

Motives. This is a crucial issue. The authors appear to have unselfish motives at the core of their teachings about "boundaries," but such appearances are deceiving. Here are their *claims*:

"Our real target is maturity--the ability to love successfully and work successfully, the way God does." (p. 280)

"Boundary setting is a large part of maturing. We can't really love until we have boundaries--otherwise we love out of compliance or guilt." (p. 280)

The purpose of "saying no" is supposedly to "protect and develop the time, talents, and treasures that God has allocated to us." (p. 286)

"When we say no to people and activities that are hurtful to us, we are protecting God's investment." (p. 105)

"Appropriate boundaries actually increase our ability to care about others." (p. 103)

This may sound *almost* biblical, to love and work "the way God does." Certainly, true biblical love arises from a grateful heart, not mere obligation (although obligation to love does exist). And it is true that God has provided "time, talents, and treasures" to develop for His glory. However, self interest, and pain, is given a higher priority than obedience to God: "The driving force behind boundaries has to be desires" (p. 239). Desire to please God, perhaps? No. While they acknowledge obedience to God as the best reason, they immediately state that "sometimes we need a more compelling reason than obedience...we need to see that what is right is also good for us" (p. 239), and "pain motivates us to act" (p. 239). Thus, self-interest, including the reduction of pain, is considered a *more compelling reason* than obedience to God. Certainly this ought to expose the selfish underpinnings of "boundary" teachings.

It is intriguing to look at what the authors claim to be "false motives" that hinder people in setting boundaries: fear of

the loss of love, fear of abandonment, fear of an angry response, fear of loneliness, fear of being hurt, guilt, the burden to pay others back, desire for approval, and overidentification with the pain of others (p. 91-92). Many are "afraid that if they set boundaries they will not have any love in their life" (p. 37).

Some people, especially in religious circles, are said to believe that "setting boundaries" is a sign of rebellion or disobedience (p. 105). Some "have been taught by their church or their family that boundaries are unbiblical, mean, or selfish" (p. 37). However:

"People who have shaky limits are often compliant on the outside, but rebellious and resentful on the inside. They would like to be able to say no, but are afraid." (p. 105)

"An internal no nullifies an external yes. God is more concerned with our hearts than He is with our outward compliance.... When our motive is fear, we love not."
(p. 106)

The numerous fears noted above are indeed sinful motives, generally representing the *fear of man*, which the Bible teaches is a snare. It is certainly true that God is concerned about the heart and its motives. However, we have established earlier that the motives promoted by these authors are fundamentally rooted in the inherent selfishness of the human heart. They rightly note the fear of man as the wrong motive, but fail to teach the fear of the Lord as the right motive. Sometimes the action recommended is the right one, such as the confrontation of sin, but the reason is rooted in self-protection rather than glorifying God and biblically restoring another.

Anger. The authors describe a "reactive phase of boundary creation" where "pent-up rage explodes" and they claim this is "*necessary but not sufficient* for the establishment of boundaries" (p. 95). Anger was discussed earlier, and the perspective of the authors is more grounded in Freudian ventilation than biblical truth. Note how this differs from James 1:19-20:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for the anger of man does not bring about the righteousness of God."

Sin. It was noted earlier that the authors briefly acknowledge the role of sin, stating that "we also contribute to

our own boundary development problems by our own depravity" (p. 82). Later, they state that when we stand before the Lord, we cannot use "but I had a dysfunctional family" as an excuse (p. 178). Absolutely true! They go on to say that while we are *influenced* by our background, "we are ultimately responsible for what we do with our injured, immature souls" (p. 178). Yes, there is an *influence* from the home environment, which may either encourage inherent sinful tendencies, or encourage growth in godliness. However, the primary "sin" here is taking "ownership" of one's own life, "setting boundaries," and "what we do with our *injured* souls," rather than disobedience to God's commands. The authors' view of sin is tainted by their psychological presuppositions.

Serving others. When the authors speak about respect for the "boundaries" of others, their comments seem biblical:

"Heeding others' boundaries helps children to love." (p. 183)

"Loving others' boundaries confronts our selfishness and omnipotence. When we concerned about protecting the treasures of others, we work against the self-centeredness that is part of our fallen nature." (p. 282)

"Loving others' boundaries increases our capacity to care about others." (p. 282)

To be sure, we must confront our selfishness and demonstrate loving respect for others. At this point, the authors are *better* in their analysis than when their focus is on setting "boundaries" for oneself.

However, they wrongly view service to other people as a *choice* rather than God's *command*:

"It is good to sacrifice and deny yourself for the sake of others. But you need boundaries to make that choice."
(p. 135)

The motivation of the heart, in serving others, is crucial. Nevertheless, biblically it is not a *choice*. One's heart must be right *with God* in order to serve others with a naturally joyful heart.

The authors claim that "boundaries are a 'litmus test' for the quality of our relationships" (p. 108), that "setting limits

has to do with telling the truth" (p. 108). We can agree that in the body of Christ our relationships are built on truth, spoken in love. However, as noted several other times, the Christian must be willing to endure persecution and hardship for the cause of Christ, sometimes not actively defending himself in the face of severe trials. The "litmus test" is what most glorifies God, not "boundaries" or the lack thereof.

Another error noted in this book is the separation of "ministry relationships" from friendships:

"We need to be comforted before we can comfort. That may mean setting boundaries on our ministries so that we can be nurtured by our friends." (p. 149)

This is similar to the condescending, one-up/one-down, "professional" relationships established by psychologists. All of our relationships are "ministry relationships," as God calls us to continually minister to one another in the body of Christ, and to evangelize unbelievers. Our own comfort is to be received from God:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

The following verses note the intense hardships endured for the gospel, and the necessity of *reliance on God, not self*:

"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. *But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.* He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will

give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, emphasis added)

This passage is so utterly foreign to the self-protective, psychological "boundary" teachings, that the contrast hardly needs to be stated. Note carefully the call here to suffer for the gospel, even to the point of death, and to rely always on God--never self.

The Nature of Man. Underlying the supposedly unselfish nature of setting boundaries, there is an unbiblical view of man. Most critically, the authors never acknowledge the radical nature of the difference between believer and unbeliever. That in itself could occupy many pages. Note briefly, however, a distinction they do make, *without any reference to salvation*:

"Good, honest people need discipline, and they respond, however, reluctantly, to limits. Others have what psychologists call 'character disorders;' they don't want to take responsibility for their own actions and lives. When their friends and spouses refuse to take responsibility for them, they move on." (p. 247-8)

"Good, honest people?" Is this their evaluation of *Christians*? They do not say. Sin is reduced to a "character disorder" in the next sentence, obscuring the crucial fact that the unbeliever is dead in sins and trespasses. The Christian is regenerated and now able to begin sanctification, but only God is truly *good*. The reality and nature of sin must not be minimized or confused, as it is here.

Besides the difference between believer and unbeliever, there is the universal reality of the sinful nature. It is far more serious than these authors ever admit. If you are resistant to "setting boundaries," the authors offer this comfort:

"The problem is not that you are with a bad person and your misery is their fault. The problem is that you lack boundaries." (p. 255)

How do they evaluate "good" and "bad" people? What has happened to terms like *sin* and *righteousness*? You may indeed be with a sinful person whose behavior creates a severe trial in your life. That person may well be at fault. God does call you to respond with joy (James 1:2-4) rather than to simply be miserable. The problem is not, however, that you "lack boundaries." You may be

called to boldly confront that person, or you may be called to respond righteously, but not self-protectively, to the other's ungodliness. The issue is what glorifies God, not self-protection.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

A more complete critique of psychologized, Minirth-Meier style forgiveness is offered elsewhere (see "Forgiving *Who?*," a critique of *Forgiving Our Parents, Forgiving Ourselves*, by Minirth-Meier author David Stoop). However, a few words are needed to see the correlation between this erroneous view of forgiveness and the "boundary" concept.

The authors express concern that "when you refuse to forgive someone...*it keeps you tied to him forever*" (p. 134). This gives us a hint that *Boundaries* presents a selfishly motivated view of forgiveness.

Another major concern expressed is that:

"Many people are afraid to forgive because they equate that with letting down their boundaries one more time and giving the other person the power to hurt them again." (p. 251)

In response to that fear:

"Warning: *Forgiveness and opening up to more abuse are not the same thing.* Forgiveness has to do with the past. Reconciliation and boundaries have to do with the future." (p. 263)

Related to this is the authors' unbiblical separation of forgiveness and reconciliation:

"Forgiveness is something we do in our hearts.... Forgiveness takes one; reconciliation takes two." (p. 251)

"If someone is in denial, or only giving lip service to getting better, without trying to make changes, or seeking help, I need to keep my boundaries, even though I have forgiven them." (p. 263)

"You need to clearly communicate that, while you have forgiven her, you do not trust her yet, for she has not proven herself trustworthy." (p. 252)

Certainly, the believer must at all times have a forgiving heart, ready and willing to grant actual forgiveness at the first statement of repentance. Except in this limited sense, forgiveness does involve two parties; it is essentially two-sided. It also does involve the future. Forgiveness is a promise to the one who sinned--a promise to "remember no more" the sin committed. Forgiveness is tenderhearted kindness to another person. Restoration of that person, and reconciliation of the relationship, are vital. The believer may indeed risk being let down again; the future must be entrusted to God's care.

Much of the error promulgated here is rooted in an unbiblical concept of God's forgiveness, on which our own forgiveness is based:

"God forgave the world, but the whole world is not reconciled to Him." (p. 251)

"Forgiveness is not denial.... God did not deny what we did to Him. He worked through it. He named it. He expressed His feelings about it. He cried and was angry. And then, He let it go. And He did this in the context of relationship. Within the Trinity, He was never alone." (p. 264)

The whole world is *not* reconciled to God. The sins of unbelievers are *not* forgiven, and in eternity, the sins of those who never came to Christ will *never* be forgiven. The second quote is a serious distortion of the nature of God in contrast to man. God does not "work through" His feelings as psychologists so wrongly recommend! God isn't sitting on some celestial psychiatric couch giving vent to His feelings! This is simply ridiculous, and dishonoring to the sovereign Lord who has chosen in Christ, from all eternity, those whom He *will* save.

Exegetical Horror Stories

A huge amount of Scripture is quoted throughout *Boundaries*, and thus it appears to the undiscerning reader that the conclusions of the authors are biblically sound. Unfortunately, interpretations of Scripture are bent to fit preconceived psychological theories. Several examples will serve to illustrate the point. It would take an entire book to present every case of their self-serving exegesis.

Luke 2:49. In this passage, Mary and Joseph have been anxiously searching for Jesus, who at age twelve was in the temple teaching. Jesus responded to His parents, "Why were you searching

for Me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Here is what the authors say, promoting a psychological explanation:

"Translation: I have values, thoughts, and opinions that are different from yours, Mother. Jesus knew who He was not, as well as who He was." (p. 66)

This verse has nothing to do with "boundaries." The quotation above dishonors Jesus Christ, bringing Him down to the level of man. Jesus was speaking of His deity here, not "setting boundaries" or simply expressing "values, thoughts, and opinions" that differed from His parents. The authors impose their psychologized understanding on the text. This is not the correct way to exegete Scripture.

2 Corinthians 5:10. This verse speaks clearly of our accountability before God:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."

The authors wrongly use this Scripture to support their unbiblical ideas of relying on self:

"Even with God's help...meeting our own needs is basically our job." (p. 105)

The full passage here, verses 1-10, speaks of the believer looking forward to his heavenly dwelling with the Lord in eternity. With this eternal focus in mind, Paul exhorts the Christian:

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it." (2 Corinthians 5:8-9)

This exhortation to *please God* is grounded in the reality that we must personally stand before Him, accountable for all our earthly deeds. This has nothing to do with "meeting our own needs," but everything to do with living a life that glorifies *God*. The authors again read into the Scripture their preconceived beliefs.

2 Corinthians 7:8-9. The authors state that "an inability to accept others' boundaries can indicate a problem in taking responsibility" (p. 117-8). Citing these two verses in 2 Corinthians, they claim that "the Corinthians took, accepted, and

responded well to Paul's boundaries, whatever they were" (p. 118). Here is what the Scripture actually says:

"Even if you were grieved by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it--I see that my letter grieved you, but only for a little while--yet now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your being grieved led you to repentance. For you were grieved as God intended, so that you were not harmed in any way by us."

There is nothing in these verses, or the surrounding verses, to indicate that Paul was "setting boundaries" as defined by psychologists. This passage may perhaps refer back to a situation such as presented in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul strongly commanded the Corinthians to deal biblically with the sin in their congregation. Such action is far removed from the self-protective "boundaries" urged by the authors, but rather is focused on honoring God and restoring those entangled in sin.

Revelation 2. The authors cite the letters to the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, claiming that the Lord "confronted their irresponsibilities (boundaries)" (p. 120).

The Lord did indeed confront *sin* in these churches. Ephesus was doctrinally sound, but lacked love. Pergamum remained faithful but tolerated false doctrine. Thyatira performed good deeds of service, but also tolerated false teachings. (These latter two church letters ought to sound a loud alarm to the churches today who tolerate the false doctrines of psychology!) In each case, Christ confronted *sin*. The connection with "setting boundaries," as psychologists define the practice, is not evident. Again, the authors read into the text a concept that is not there.

Romans 5:20. The authors claim here that "Paul tells us the law's 'should' increases our wish to rebel" (p. 194). This passage (verses 11-21) teaches about the imputation of Adam's sin to all men, and the parallel with the righteousness of Christ, imputed to believers. Paul explains in verse 14 that death reigned even between Adam and the time of Moses, when the law was formally given. The law caused the trespass to abound (verse 20); the law clearly defined sin. This verses does *not* say that the law "increases our wish to rebel." The law itself does not create such a change in the human heart. The rebelliousness of the heart has existed since Adam. The law makes it clearly evident, but does not *cause* that rebellion. Again, the authors twist the Scripture to say what they want it to say.

Romans 4:15. Here the authors claim that the law "makes us angry at what we 'should' do" (p. 194), distorting a beautiful passage concerning our justification by faith in Christ. This verse does state that the law brings wrath, but it speaks of *God's wrath* here, and the fact that no man is justified by keeping the law because no man is able to keep the law. Attempts to be justified by perfect law keeping, rather than faith in Christ, are futile and bring on the wrath of God. This verse *does not say* that the law causes *human* anger about "what we 'should' do."

Romans 7:5. Again confusing the purpose of God's law, the authors say that it "arouses our motivations to do the wrong thing" (p. 194). In Romans 6:1-14, 6:15-23, and 7:1-6, Paul uses three illustrations to drive home the point that Christ has broken the power of sin in the life of the believer. Verse 7:5 occurs in the illustration from marriage. The Christian is no longer "married" to sin and has no further obligation to the lusts of the flesh:

"For when we were in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit."
(Romans 7:5-6)

At first glance, without careful study of the context, the authors' exegesis appears to find support here. But they misunderstand the purpose of God's law, and the fact that *it is good*. Paul affirms the goodness of the law numerous times, clearing any misconception that the believer has any "license" to continue to sin (see 3:31 and 7:7, for example). The law does not cause rebellion, anger, or sinful passion, but serves to expose them in the light of God's standards. No man can be right with God by keeping the law, because he would have to keep it perfectly. This he cannot do. Christ has fulfilled the obligations of the law for him, paying the penalty for sin and also breaking the power of sin. The believer now has the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable him to lovingly obey God's law, although he doesn't do so perfectly in this life.

Hebrews 5:8. The authors cite this verse to support their views about responding to failure:

"Allow yourself to fail. Addressing your real need is no guarantee that your out-of-control behavior will disappear.... The recurrence of destructive patterns is evidence of God's sanctifying, maturing, and preparing us for eternity." (p. 222)

"We need to embrace failure instead of trying to avoid it." (p. 222)

The verse noted in Hebrews instructs us that Christ, "even though a Son, learned obedience through the things He suffered." The most glaring exegetical problem here is the authors' equation of human *sinful* failings with the Lord's *suffering*. *Jesus Christ, being fully God as well as fully man, never sinned*. He does promise to be a sympathetic High Priest, understanding our weaknesses, and we can rely on His help in times of temptation. But this verse does not teach that He ever *sinned*, as we do. The interpretation of the authors all too easily leads to a lax attitude toward sin. The "recurrence of destructive patterns" is not "evidence of God's sanctifying, maturing, and preparing us for eternity." Quite the contrary! Those patterns ought to *decrease* as God sanctifies the believer! We are never taught in Scripture to "embrace failure," but rather to honestly acknowledge it, repent, and trust God for cleansing and change.

"Take up your cross." Clearly alluding to the wording of Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23, the authors say:

"Decide if you are willing to risk loss. Is the 'cross you must pick up' worth it to you for your 'very self?'" (p. 248)

This sentence is within the context of responding to the resistance of others when you begin to "set boundaries," and deciding how much you might be willing to risk losing in a particular relationship. The "cross" here is what you suffer when you *fail* to set "boundaries." It is clearly a "cross" that the authors advise you to drop. The "cross" in the Gospel passages, however, is one that the Lord teaches you *must* take up in order to follow Him. You must be willing to lose your own soul for His sake, but the authors are intent on pushing you toward the very opposite--keeping your own self. This exegesis is a reversal of the Scriptures!

Proverbs 4:23. The authors cite this well-known verse to say that:

"For years, Christians have been taught that protecting their spiritual and emotional property is selfish. Yet God is

interested in people loving others, and you can't love others unless you have received love inside yourself." (p. 276-7)

The verse in Proverbs says:

"With utmost vigilance, guard your *heart*, because from it is the starting point of life." (emphasis added)

The authors recommend that you guard "treasures" such as "your time, money, feelings, and beliefs," and they equate the "guarding of your heart" with "getting help and learning self-protection and biblical boundaries" (p. 277).

However, that is *not* the point of this particular Scripture, frequently cited by psychologists to promote self-interest. Biblically, the *heart* is the whole inner man--thoughts, emotions, will, desires, and the like. Jesus taught that out of the *heart* of man come sins such as murder, immorality, slander, and the like (Matthew 15:19). The purpose of guarding one's heart, therefore, is to void sinning against the Lord. It is *not* self-protection of feelings, money, and so forth. Nor does it have anything to do with seeking love *for* oneself. In the process of guarding the heart against sin, it will of course be necessary to use time, money, and talents in a manner that honors God, and sinful feelings and beliefs will need to be put off. The process, however, is clearly *not* what is pictured by the "boundary setting," self-protective strategies of these authors.

"Boundaries" in Scripture. The Bible uses the term "boundary" numerous times, most prominently in the Old Testament: Numbers 34:2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:17, 32:8; Joshua 13:23, 15:2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 21, 16:5, 17:7, 8, 9, 18:12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 19:10, 14, 22, 26, 29, 33, 34, 22:25; 2 Kings 14:25; Judges 1:36; Job 24:2, 26:10; Psalms 16:6, 74:17, 104:9; Proverbs 8:29, 15:25, 22:28, 23:10; Isaiah 10:13; Jeremiah 5:22; Ezekiel 47:13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 48:28; Hosea 5:10; Micah 7:11. The overwhelming usage of this concept is in defining geographical, political territories. God does not speak in such terminology concerning human relationships. In the concluding remarks to this paper, we will look at some biblical *separations* that God teaches in His Word, as well as *why* "boundaries" is an inappropriate term for biblical responsibilities. For now, simply note that God uses the word "boundaries" in the Bible for political territories, but *not* to teach us how to relate to one another.

Creator and Creation

The manner in which the authors view God is particularly alarming. In discussing forgiveness, we noted how they see God as "working through His feelings" toward our sin, in much the same way that psychologists counsel. In the section on biblical exegesis, we saw their view that Jesus was "setting boundaries" when He was in the temple teaching and His parents couldn't find Him. In both instances, the authors see the sovereign, almighty God in psychological terms that fail miserably to acknowledge the distinction between Creator and creation, or creature. This is in spite of the fact that they give lip service to that separation:

"God defines Himself as a distinct, separate being, and He is responsible for Himself." He is "separate from His creation." (p. 32)

They also claim that God has "boundaries within the Trinity" (p. 33). It appears, perhaps, that they see God's distinction in terms of the "boundaries" they advise for man. They do not see the Creator/creature distinction, but rather an individual creature/creature distinction that applies equally to God and man.

The authors consider the Bible "a living book about relationships," noting also that it "contains rules, principles, and stories that explain what it is like to exist on this earth" (p. 228). Indeed, Scripture explains man's alienation from God through sin, instructs us in God's plan for redemption, and also speaks to us about our relationships with others. Scripture is *sufficient* in these areas, not needing any addition from the psychological theories of unregenerate men. Such additions only confuse and distort man's relationship with God and others. This book is an example of such distortion!

God's Sovereignty. The authors attribute freedom to God in His decisions:

"God is free from us. When He does something for us, He does it out of choice." (p. 232)

Note their application to human relationships:

"In the same way that we want others to respect our no, God wants us to respect His. He does not want us to make Him the bad guy when He makes a choice." (p. 232)

God is truly sovereign. He is the one who works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). He

controls whatsoever comes to pass. His sovereignty, however, is not equivalent to human "boundary setting."

The authors do not fully recognize God's sovereignty:

"Sometimes, through dialogue, He changes His mind. We can influence Him because ours is a real relationship of the kind Abraham had with God.... It wouldn't be a real relationship if we couldn't." (p. 233)

It is true that God has ordained prayer, and that we are told to bring our requests before Him. From our finite human perspective, it may *appear* that God has "changed" His mind. The authors note the story of Ninevah in the book of Jonah, where they claim "boundaries" were "renegotiated" after the city repented (p. 120). However, He remains sovereign, fully in control of whatever comes to pass. God had determined to save Ninevah, and He sovereignly orchestrated the circumstances of their repentance, including bringing a reluctant prophet to their doorstep. As we bring our petitions before Him, we are reminded of the words in the Lord's prayer, "Your will be done." We cannot *influence* God. The relationship between God and man is *not* exactly parallel to the relationship between one person and another. The Creator/creature distinction is crucial. There is admittedly mystery here, as God calls us to prayer and promises to answer, while retaining His sovereign control. However, there is no hint of that mystery in what the authors have to say.

God and Human "Boundaries." The authors make numerous comments about how God supposedly does not violate our "boundaries:"

"God respects our boundaries in many ways. First, He leaves work for us to do that only we can do." (p. 229)

"He does not rescue us; He wants us to work it out for our own good. He will not violate our wish to be left alone." (p. 229)

"He respects our no. He tries neither to control nor nag us. He allows us to say no and go our way." (p. 229)

"Until we can own our boundaries with God, we can't ever change them or allow Him to work with them." (p. 230)

To fully comment on these statements, it would be necessary to go into a theological discussion that is beyond the scope of this

paper, concerning the issue of God's sovereignty versus human responsibility. God is fully sovereign and in control of whatsoever comes to pass. Numerous Scriptures speak clearly of His omnipotence, His almighty power. Salvation is *His work*, not a matter of human choice. At the same time, every person is responsible before God for his actions, his sin. These authors leave far too much to human choice. God *does* rescue us. Every Christian has been *rescued* from the eternal penalty for sin, through the work of Christ on the cross. God *sometimes* allows sin to escalate, as Paul notes in Romans that God "gave them over" (Romans 1:24, 26) to their sinful desires. However, during the time prior to Christ's second coming, God restrains sin. This is called "common grace." He does exercise significant control. The picture painted by the quotations above is one of a finite God on the sidelines of life, and that is certainly not what Scripture teaches. God does give us work to do, and we are accountable for doing it, yet He is involved and in control of every detail of our lives.

Anger at God. Here is perhaps where the authors are most unbiblical:

"In our deeper honesty and ownership of our true person, there is room for expressing anger at God." (p. 231)

"Until they feel the anger (at God), they cannot feel the loving feelings underneath the anger." (p. 231)

At the same time, they also state:

"When we are angry with Him for what He does not do, we are not allowing Him the freedom to be who He is.... We need to respect that freedom (God's freedom)." (p. 231)

Anger toward God is *sin*! It is not something to be "expressed," but rather confessed as the sin that it is. Nothing in the Bible teaches that we must *feel anger* in order to love another--not another person, and certainly not God! This is absurd. The final quotation above is inconsistent with the other two comments quoted, but even here, who is man to allow God the freedom to be who He is? The very idea dishonors God, putting Him on a level with man. We must do far more than simply "respect that freedom," in the sense in which the authors counsel you to "respect the boundaries" of another person. Rather we must bow before Him in reverential fear and worship.

God's "Boundaries." The authors see God as setting self-protective "boundaries" in a manner similar to what they recommend to those they counsel:

"God is the ultimate responsibility taker.... If we continue to abuse Him, He is not masochistic; He will take care of Himself.... Whenever God decides that 'enough is enough, and He has suffered long enough, He respects His own property, His heart, enough to do something to make it better. He takes responsibility for the pain and makes moves to make His life different. He lets go of the rejecting people and reaches out to some new friends." (p. 234)

This is utter nonsense. It reduces the Creator to the level of the creature. It mutilates what the Scriptures say about God's long-suffering, His kindness, His call to repentance, and Christ's *intense* suffering on the Cross to purchase our redemption. He does not demonstrate the self-protective boundary-setting qualities that the psychologists promote. Their statements also distort what the Bible says about God's *judgment*. Being absolutely holy and righteous, He has the *right* to issue a final judgment against sin and to pour out His wrath. The book of Revelation describes how He will do exactly that, while demonstrating His mercy toward His saints. What the authors say about God's "boundaries" destroys the biblical concept of God. In fact, their whole doctrine of God is one that undermines the Creator/creature distinction.

Conclusions

The concept of "boundaries," contrary to the claims of Drs. Cloud and Townsend, is not a biblical one. A few of the most serious objections need to be summarized in our concluding remarks.

We have noted the authors' claim that "setting boundaries" is designed ultimately to make possible the love of God and others. However, there is absolutely *nothing* about the necessity for the believer to be willing to endure hardship and persecution for the cause of Christ. The whole mentality of "boundary" setting cries against the willingness to joyfully face such trials. Instead, "setting boundaries" feeds into the inherent self-focus of the human heart. Man naturally protects, loves, nourishes, and cherishes himself and his own interests. Man has turned from the glory of God to seek his own glory. What he needs to learn is not how to "set boundaries" and protect himself, but how to die to self and serve Christ without reservation.

Biblically, the word "boundaries" refers to political or geographical borders, not to personal relationships. Such territories do not overlap and are quite impersonal. Biblical responsibilities, however, *often do overlap*, even though each person is ultimately responsible before God for his own sin. For example, if one person sins against another, *each person has a responsibility to initiate reconciliation*. If both fulfill their duties before God, they ought to meet halfway. Also, Christians have responsibilities to assist in restoring one another when one falls into sin. This sense of mutual responsibility has no place in the psychological teaching of "boundaries."

The counsel on the cover of *Boundaries*, "to take control of your life," fails to acknowledge the necessity of *absolute* trust in God. We are not called to protect ourselves and to focus on getting our own "needs" met. Rather, we are called to a radical trust in God, just as Christ entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly, even in the face of the most unjust, severe persecution in history.

The Bible does teach *separation* at times, but this is a concept far removed from "boundaries." We are taught to flee temptations (2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Corinthians 6:18), in order to avoid falling into sin and thus dishonoring God. We are to separate from false doctrine and those who cause division in the body of Christ (Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:10), but again, the focus is on the honor of God and the care of others who may be easily deceived. Believers are holy, "set apart," consecrated to God. Yet even as we are called out of the world in this sense, and are no longer of the world, we must be the salt and light of the earth, ambassadors for Christ. There are times to discipline a fallen brother or sister, but always for his ultimate restoration and salvation (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5). None of this reflects the basically *self-focused* teaching of "boundaries." The idea must be rejected as unbiblical, and we must return to biblical categories for understanding and correcting sinful behavior, and for loving God and others.

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