

## "Boundaries" -- Drawing the *Wrong* Line!

*Boundaries*. This modern psychological "buzzword" is used by authors John Townsend and Henry Cloud to explain, diagnose, and prescribe solutions for a vast array of human sin. They are not alone. In today's psychologized church, it is considered a "sin" to neglect the construction of personal "boundaries." But is this term really an appropriate metaphor to carry the load that psychologists assign to it?

In his interview with *Lifeskills*, Cloud defines "boundary" as "simply a property line." In Scripture, the term indeed is used to describe geographical property lines, but never *personal* "property lines." It serves geography well but mutilates the biblical concept of personal responsibility. But Cloud goes on to articulate a psychological system where "boundaries" define our personal responsibilities. Several key problems emerge.

**Self-Control?** The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control along with eight other qualities (Galatians 5). Psychological "boundaries" encourage *taking control* and *assuming ownership* of our own lives in a manner that conflicts with the biblical view that believers are to *submit control* to God, knowing that they are *not* their own, having been "bought at a price," the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19).

**Sorting out responsibilities?** The Bible does demand that we assume our proper responsibilities before God, and that we not contribute to the sins of others. Cloud, however, never makes it clear that we are responsible *before God* for keeping *His* commandments. Instead, the thrust of his writing encourages a responsibility to *self*. Furthermore, he never mentions the mutual, overlapping responsibilities described in Scriptures such as Ezekiel 3, Matthew 18:15-20, and Galatians 6:1-5. The result is an unbiblical emphasis on the individual that obscures the unity and interdependence of the body of Christ.

**Compulsion or Freedom?** The "boundaries" concept encourages people to give freely rather than in response to the pressure of others. "Shoulds" and "oughts" are discarded as a hindrance to interpersonal relationships. Yet God does give commands concerning our responsibilities in the lives of others. Such commands are conveniently skipped over when discussing "boundaries." Rather than casting off "shoulds," believers need to focus on obeying biblical commands in grateful response to Christ's work on the cross, knowing that He has set them free from the enslaving power of sin so that they *can* obey (Romans 6).

**Need theology?** The "boundaries" concept is driven by the erroneous psychological assumption that human beings are fundamentally *victims* due to *unmet needs*, rather than *sinner*s whose *ungodly desires* remain unsatisfied. Such thinking destroys the responsibility that Cloud claims to promote, and it destroys the Christian's *hope*. How can he change until his "needs" are met in a "safe place" with "safe people"? Cloud claims that God "wants us to grow and develop our boundaries so we won't invite hurt again." But the God revealed in Scripture calls His people to joyfully endure hardship, even persecution, for the eternal cause of Christ. Cloud says to forgive because "unforgiveness keeps you tied to unhealthy relationships." Scripture says to forgive because "God in Christ has forgiven you."

Perhaps...if "boundaries" merely encouraged believers to help others assume their rightful biblical responsibilities, and to not share in the sins of those others, it would be a helpful concept. As formulated, however, it contributes to the inherent selfishness of the human heart and to the "victim" mentality of our culture, weakens the unity of Christ's body (the church), and downplays suffering for the cause of Christ. This rampant psychoheresy needs to be exposed and confronted for the error that it is.