

### Where Are The Boundary Stones? Part 3

After a two Sunday break with special services we are looking again this morning at the idea of boundary stones. Let me just quickly remind you, in ancient times stones were used to mark the boundaries of property, the boundaries of your territory. The bible warns against moving the ancient boundary stones. **“Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.” Proverbs 22:28.** The Law of Moses declares, **“Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor’s boundary stone.” Deuteronomy 27:17.** We are using the idea of boundary stones to describe the body of truth we are to live by, those things we know are right and wrong, including the absolutes of God’s word.

In the first sermon we talked about the fact that the boundary stones of our society have been moved. In earlier years there seemed to be a consensus about what was morally right and wrong. We knew the boundaries of common decency and appropriateness, but the boundaries have been moved. “Who are you to impose your values and your morals on me? Your truth isn’t my truth.” The consensus is gone. Sadly, the same can be said for the church and the Christian faith. It seems the ancient boundary stones have been moved. “Who are you to say Jesus is the only way or that your interpretation of the bible is the right way?”

You will recall I said we are living in a hinge period of history. Every five hundred years or so there has been what some have called a reconfiguration of the church and our faith and one of the first things to be lost and one of the first things that must be established is who or what speaks with authority for the church. What is the basis for our understanding of what is right and wrong? I told you in those first two sermons I believe the authority for us and our faith is the word of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the collected wisdom of the church. It is those three things together that provide the boundary stones that determine what we believe, how we act, how we live as followers of Christ and as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Think with me for a minute. Realistically, how do most people decide what to do and what not to do? Peter Kreeft in his book *Making Choices* suggests three basic standards: **“(1) Social fads and fashions, other’s expectations, peer pressure, ‘everybody’s doing it’; (2) our feelings (‘it can’t be wrong if it feels so right’); and (3) our desire for the easiest, most pleasant, least troublesome life.”** Kreeft wrote, **“I think most of us use these three standards far more often than the standard of good and evil, right and wrong, in deciding what to do.**

**If we're asked why we did something, how often do we answer, 'Because it was right?'**

**...Peter Kreeft**

The fact is, in our culture, the boundary stones have been moved and the lines of truth have been blurred. No one is willing to say anything is right or wrong because we will be accused of being narrow-minded or judgmental, or even worse, intolerant. And we sure don't want to risk saying, "This is right or wrong because the bible says this is right or wrong." Our culture has decided there is no absolute truth, there is no right or wrong, everything is relative. Based on our own feelings and opinions we have embraced tolerance and compassion as the only worthwhile moral values. If the church says some behavior, some ethic, some belief is wrong or untrue, or if we call it sin and speak God's truth, we are blasted as being uncompassionate and narrow minded, bigoted and intolerant.

If you go to the doctor and he tells you that you have cancer and he tells you he is going to put you through months of painful chemotherapy and then do a radical surgery in order to save your life, do we call him uncompassionate and bigoted, intolerant and hurtful? Do we suggest he should be more compassionate toward the tumor that is growing in your body and the cancer that is poisoning and destroying your health? Of course not. But you go to the church and to the pastor and he says, "what you have according to the bible is a sin problem, what you are doing is sinful and it is like a cancer in your soul and it will destroy you. What you must do is repent and seek God's forgiveness and then separate yourself from that sin and you will have a new life." The response of the world is to condemn the church for being so judgmental and intolerant while the doctor is commended for his compassionate care. Should the church be more compassionate toward the sin that is growing in your life and that is going to poison you and kill you? Of course not. The sin in your life is worse than the cancer. The cancer may kill you, the sin will send you to hell! We should always be compassionate toward the sinner just as a doctor is compassionate toward the patient, but the sin, the cancer, has to go!

Jesus took a serious view of sin and its devastating effects. In fact, he was rather intolerant of the sin, but we know how much he loved the sinner. Jesus said, "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." Matthew 18:9

What I'm saying is there are moral absolutes, boundary stones that God has given to us that we must honor and obey and we have to take this seriously. These aren't values we tip our hat toward, these are commands we honor and obey. "Thou shalt not kill" is not a value we embrace, it is an absolute, a command, a moral law we must obey. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." That is a moral absolute. It doesn't suddenly change or become right because you feel like you love someone else. Those are moral laws, boundary stones for our lives and they are there for a reason. We didn't make them up, they were given to us. Kreeft said, "Values come from us; laws come to us. We invent values but we are under laws. Values are nice ideals to aspire to if we wish; laws tell us what we ought to do whether we like it or not."

God has established moral laws, moral absolutes that we must honor and obey. We know not everything is spelled out for us in the bible, that's why we have the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of the church to help us in making wise judgement and decisions. But there are clear boundary stones spelled out in Scripture that guide our choices and guard us on our journey.

Understand, **We didn't set the boundary stones, God did.** Since God set them in place, I would say that makes them pretty important. There are absolute truths of Scripture that are non-negotiable, non-transferable. But why do we even need them?

**God set the boundary stones for our own safety and good.** Think of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. God told them to eat from any tree but that one. He set a boundary. The tree was off limits for good reason. The truth they needed to know was found in their relationship with and their knowledge of God, not in a piece of fruit. God was telling them for their own good and for the good of their children and the next generations and for all of us, to honor and respect his boundaries. They didn't and we know how that turned out for all of us. They crossed the boundary and the result was the introduction of sin and disease and violence and greed and pain and death into our world.

The problem is, we've been deceived into believing that the boundaries don't matter. But here is the deal, if God is truth and he speaks the truth, then what he says matters. If God is speaking the truth, then His boundary stones matter. If God says this matters and if you believe him, then it should matter to you as well. These boundary stones matter and your decision to live within his boundaries and obey his word matters in every aspect of your life!

Consider this. God says we are to be holy because he is holy and that applies to every area of our life. Let's use the ever popular sexual behavior as an example. ("Do we have to talk

about sex? Pick on another sin!” Well, the bible does say to **“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.** Sexual behavior matters to God and there are some absolutes stated in the bible, some boundary markers.

The bible says sex outside of marriage is sin, it calls it fornication. It says adultery is sin. Promiscuity is sin, (sleeping around, hooking up, whatever you want to call it). There is a boundary marker of truth there and God’s word says, “don’t go beyond the boundary marker.” But remember what we said about how we really decide what is right or wrong? 1)Everybody is doing it, 2) it can’t be wrong if it feels so right and 3)this is the easiest and least troublesome way for me. So in spite of the fact we believe God’s word and in spite of the fact God told us not to go beyond this boundary, we decide to go beyond it anyway. Is that really a problem? Why does it really matter?

Now, before you walk out thinking, “Pastor and the church think I’m a sinner and they condemn me and I’m getting out of here.” Remember our doctor analogy? You wouldn’t walk out of the doctor’s office and say, “I’m never going back to that guy because he hates me and he says I have cancer and I know I don’t.” I think all of us, too often, decide what’s right or wrong based on those three things we mentioned rather than on the absolute truth of God’s word. The bible says all of us have sinned and missed the mark. I’m not pointing fingers, I’m teaching the truth of God’s word. I’m telling you where the boundary stones are so you won’t get hurt!

If you decide to go to Israel with us next year, we will go up to the Golan Heights. From Mt. Bental you can see into Syria, Lebanon, Jordan. As you drive down from the Golan you see fences with signs that say, **“Danger. No Trespassing. Mines.”** Those signs are boundary stones of truth whether you choose to believe them or not. Each of us has the power of free will to decide whether we will honor the boundary signs or not. Someone put them there, not to deprive us from having a lovely picnic on a beautiful Israeli hillside, but to keep us from getting blown up. We can argue we don’t like the placement of the signs and the fence. We think they should be on the other side of the line of trees and the pretty wild flowers, further down the hill. But remember, we didn’t place the markers there, in our spiritual analogy, God did and he did it to protect us.

He placed them there and told us within the boundaries of his truth there is abundant life but on the other side of the boundary there is danger and even death. Now here is something you need to understand. There are not always immediate consequences to transgressing against God's law and rebelling against his boundary markers. It seems to me it would be better for the rest of us if there were. You sin and within five minutes your hand falls off, now we've got some motivation to believe the warning signs and avoid sinning. But that isn't usually how it happens. You cross the boundary stones, you climb over the fence and nothing happens. No explosion. You have sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or you cheat on your spouse, or you steal money from the cash register or you lie to your boss and your friends and nothing happens. You got by with it and you really don't feel all that bad. In fact, it feels pretty good. Lightning didn't strike you. Fire didn't fall from heaven so you think, "I'm ok. Maybe there aren't any mines out here after all. It was all a bluff from the church and the pastor to keep me under their thumb." So you keep on walking through the mine field. No consequences, life is good and you are enjoying playing a little Sunday afternoon football with your friends on the other side of God's boundary marker when suddenly, everything blows up. There were mines buried there after all. You suffer the consequences of your choice, your sin and then you stare up into the sky and shout at God, "Why did you let this happen?" The sign said, "Warning. Stay out. Mine field." What part of God's truth did you not believe and understand? You moved the boundary stone or ignored the boundary stone, God's truth, and the result brought pain and death.

**Thou shalt not means thou shalt not.** When it comes to moving boundary stones, one of the things we have lost is a healthy respect for and fear of God. Perhaps it is the lack of immediate consequences to our sin and rebellion. Perhaps it is our appropriate emphasis on God's love and compassion but our failure to mention his justice and righteousness. The bible repeatedly declares **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding." Psalm 111:10** But the bible says, **"...concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: there is no fear of God before his eyes." Psalm 36:1.** When we no longer fear God, we become wise in our own eyes but foolish and reckless in all of our choices and our decisions. "God doesn't really care. It doesn't really matter." And that's how we find ourselves blown up in that minefield. The fear of the Lord is the same healthy fear and respect, that we have for the mine field. Stepping beyond the boundary stones is not wise. I fear the Lord enough, I respect the Lord enough, I love the Lord enough, I want to please the Lord enough, that if he says this is the best way to live, if he says this matters, then I will obey.

God placed the boundary stones there for our protection, so we could experience that abundant life he promised. We need to respect God and the boundary stones, the absolutes, the truth he has set in place.. Respect the boundaries because we believe God. Respect them because we believe they mark the way to a better life. It is the truth: serving Christ is a better way of life! Obeying his commands, honoring his boundary markers leads to that abundant life. If you've never read the book *Not Just Idle Words*, I would recommend it. Modesty prevents me from sharing the author's name, but the point of the book, which is about the Ten Commandments, is that God isn't simply shouting "thou shalt not" at us. On the flip side of every "thou shalt not" is a wonderful "thou shalt." God intended us to live a life of celebration as we obey his word and live within those boundaries of truth and grace.

We have chosen to make Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of our lives. When we did we chose to live in obedience to his word. His word abides in us and there is something organic and real and transformative that happens. His life is lived in us and through us and we become partakers of his life and his very nature. Living according to his word, living within the boundaries of his truth, is a blessed life, it is a better life, it is an abundant life.

Where are you in terms of the boundary stones? You believe God, but you've been making choices for your life on the other side of the boundary stones. You've been picnicking in the mine field and you realize that isn't the life for you. Maybe things have already blown up.

Or maybe you've escaped up till now, but you realize it's time to surrender your life, your choices, your lifestyle, to Jesus. It's time to live within the boundary stones he has set in place. He placed them there for your good, for your protection, so you could live that abundant life. Abundant life doesn't mean a life without challenges, but it does mean a life of purpose, a life of hope, growing in God's grace.

If you want to surrender to him and discover the security and peace of living with him and within his boundaries, why don't you join me at the front. For someone this is to be the beginning of a brand new life for you. You are discovering the truth you've been searching for. You find it in a relationship with Jesus Christ.