

The Beauty of Spiritual Boundaries

You can do your part to enjoy holy relationships

Part 2

In this second of a two-part series we explore how people violate spiritual boundaries and the damaging effects that result. There are specific things you can do to protect yourself and bless the relationships in your life. Through these we become more Christlike.

When boundaries go wrong

In part one, I highlighted the role of the Image of God in dealing with boundaries. I showed how violating boundaries not only creates hurt, but damages and disfigures God's Image in us and the people in our lives.

According to the Christian tradition, the two components of God's Image in us are the spiritual faculties of *intellect* and *freewill*. When we allow our boundaries to be compromised we start applying wrong reasoning to our life relationships: the *intellect* does not work properly. That means we rationalize what is unhealthy and unholy in maintaining dysfunctional relationships, even as we have been abused. Conversely, when we are the violators of others' boundaries we instill this cursing into them. With respect to the faculty of *freewill*, our ability to choose in line with God's plan and destiny becomes impaired as we make choices that are the result of control and manipulation. When, because of the violation of boundaries, the Image of God in us is disfigured, this causes pain in relationships: we have stopped being fully human and fully alive. It is hard to see our way out of these dilemmas and restore the divine Image.

Toni came to face the fact that Bobby, her husband of 22 years, was a prescription drug abuser. He was firmly the stronghold of the addictive cycle of keeping five or six physicians on the line for his "chronic" pain and sleep problems. He had become a functional drug abuser, maintaining his insurance agent business of many years. Everything *seemed* ideal for the couple, as they both deeply involved themselves in church activities. But the worst of Bobby's character had been drawn out by his abuse of drugs. He showed himself to be authoritarian, manipulative and deceitful towards Toni, and an emotionally absent father to their teenage son and daughter, who were manifesting their own dysfunctional relationships. His favorite tools were guilt and threats, principally to Toni, who was now feeling more and more shut down as a woman, mother and vital member of the community. In addition to the psychological tasks they faced, there was a spiritual component. When they served in the church in prayer ministry and teaching, there would often be indirect "sermons" preached to each other, under the guise of spiritual gifting and prayer. Every ministry event became laden with the weight of whether or not approval or submission was being given to each one's plans. Both ran the gamut of the spiritually addictive cycle of judgmental attitudes to "repentance" and a feigned reconciliation. Toni and Bobby did not know the reality of spiritual boundaries.

In the spiritual realm, boundaries are violated by obliging others' freewill; that is, when one is coerced into doing things that go against the free decision of others, whether by guilt, withholding of esteem, force of personality, rage or threats. It is how God's Image is distorted. As we continue in this reflection, it is vital that we look at this from two points of view:

- When we violate the boundaries of other people;
- When our own boundaries have been crossed.

We have a mighty tool: The Sword of the Spirit

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:17 that we can take up as part of our spiritual armament the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." There are several ways to consider this, principally by using the message of the scriptures as Paul teaches Timothy: "for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be upright" (2Tim 3:17).

There is another way to use the sword of the Spirit to deal head-on with the issues concerning boundaries. A sword cuts and severs, it is a battle weapon that is meant to be taken up and used precisely. We can use it as a sort of *spiritual declaration* – inward or outward – that serves to spiritually mark healthy boundaries as the occasion arises. This is something I use everyday and offer it to you as well. It is done like this: I say audibly or under my breath, "I take up the sword of the Spirit and cut and sever every un-clean and un-holy bond [another word used for bond is "soul-tie"] between me and ... [name the person, place, organization or entity involved]. I seal myself with the redemptive Blood of Jesus. Holy Spirit, fill and heal the places in me where un-holiness was allowed." This prayer will begin to spiritually set up in God's way the proper boundaries that make us healthy and take good care of relationships.

Five common ways Spiritual Boundaries go wrong: what to do

With this in mind and the "sword in hand," let's look at several common ways that boundaries go wrong and consider some guidelines on how to deal with them:

1. Be careful of violating other's spiritual boundaries by applying too much pressure to follow a particular course of action in God's service.

You can inform and gently persuade people, but the line is crossed when others follow a course of action because of you and not because of God. In the same way, it is damaging to the Image of God in you to allow others to press you and insist that you follow their designs without your free consent. When this happens, one can simply and directly place a healthy boundary by saying something like, "I've heard you, and I will decide when I am able and ready. I am not in the position to right now, and I ask you to respect that and leave the issue there." If they refuse, respect that, then in a clear way, physically and emotionally draw back from them if they are not part of your valid marriage or immediate family.

In the case of validly married spouses or other members of the immediate family the situation can become very difficult. Often it is not possible to withdraw. In this case, if there is a question of abuse, emotional, physical or spiritual, then you need to squarely face this, seek good Christian counseling and move towards healthy boundaries. The "cross" in this case is not putting up with or enabling an abuser, but steadfastly working at and insisting on good boundaries, which will cause turmoil and suffering in the relationship in the short-run, but restore the broken Image of God over the long haul. Surely, a faithful friend will need to "hold your feet to the fire" about this – long-term.

2. Beware of making up in the flesh what the Holy Spirit doesn't seem to be doing.

The falsification of God's gifts is very easy to do. Many times, people have told me that God said for me to take a particular course of action. There have been a number of people over the last years, for instance, that have said to me, "Father, the Lord is telling me that we are to minister together" as if this was a Word of Wisdom from the Lord. In reality it was their own sense of neediness that they were confusing with the Lord's voice. Characteristically, they can become very insistent, to the point of thinking I am not in God's will if they aren't ministering with me. Inviting yourself into ministry, or people inviting themselves into yours, is a sure sign that there are problems with spiritual boundaries.

If you sense the will of the Lord in regard to someone, simply plant the seed and say, "I offer help to you in whatever way you sense the Lord would lead," then leave it there; the seed has been planted, and God will give the growth in His way and time, if it is truly from Him. Jeremiah prophesied, "I watch over my word to fulfill it" (Jer. 1:8). If you are "watching" over what you feel is God's word by pressuring it to be fulfilled, you are in the flesh. Real faith and trust lets "God be God" in surrendering to His will.

If someone becomes insistent with what they feel is God's will for you, this might be an appropriate boundary: "I realize that you sense this is what you believe God is saying. When I have heard from God, I will take action, and not before." If you are in a situation of being victimized by a false "gift," affirm to yourself and to God that you *do not receive it* and soon afterwards cut unholy and unclean bonds with the person.

3. Never "naysay" or curse the course of action of someone who is following what they understand to be God's leading for them, as long as it isn't immoral.

Several months ago I asked someone to pray about whether they should accompany me and participate in a ministry invitation I had discerned was from the Lord. I asked the person to consult with his inner circle of prayer partners about his going with me. Several days later he called to say that not only was he not to go, but if I went, there would be no fruit from my ministry. These words were put out into what I call the "spiritual atmosphere." Frankly, I was shocked and perplexed. After recuperating and praying, I realized that they were not *authorized* to discern whether I was going to do the ministry, rather only if this person was to participate. How *could* their discernment be true if they were not authorized to discern my ministry? Just about anything was liable to be expressed as a "spiritual gift," because, in the absence of the authority to discern, it stood a great chance of being misdirected. I could have lived with and respected his "discernment," even though it didn't agree with mine. What I could not receive, however, was the *nay-saying* that group had declared with respect to my ministry – that, I had to deal with spiritually.

From this lesson, I began to reflect on the many times I pretended to "discern" ministries and works I was not authorized to discern, even under the guise of priestly ministry. I realized that the great part of "discernments" were not that at all, just my fleshly judgments, with the result of nay-saying. I had to repent, withdraw my words and reverse the effect of these word curses by imparting blessing. This stings our pride interiorly, yet it is a godly work. I discovered that I had a spiritual boundary problem.

If someone "nay-says" or curses what you sense is the Lord's work in your life and ministry, this needs to be first of all *not* received interiorly. As a person living in covenant relationship with the Lord you have the right and authority to say in prayer, "I refuse to receive this word." Second, if it is a strong curse, like the one I heard about my ministry, then the other person needs to be somehow addressed with the opposite blessing. In the case above, I called the person, explained what was at stake and resolutely affirmed that God in fact had called me there and I believed that He would produce an abundant harvest. I was deliberately and verbally imparting to him, to his community and to the work a fresh anointing of His grace for that ministry. He was so humble that it caused me to reflect on my fleshly nay-sayings. In ministry, I have had to reverse nay-saying many times, even when those who perpetrated it were not conscious of the spiritual intervention I was doing.

4. "Witchcraft Prayer" – a danger to your soul

That term may startle you, connoting hexes and spells. But occult practices are not what are referred to here. At base, what do witches and witchdoctors pretend to do? They attempt to manipulate situations and people through "spiritual" practices. (I'll say more about that later.) Did you know that Christians can do the same with God? When we try to gain a hearing with God by the force of our prayers rather than truly seeking His will and praying towards that will, we are trying to manipulate Him. This is a magical view of prayer and a perversion of the power of His grace. I very often see this with spouses and other family members who attempt to bring relief to the marriage or family situation by either "preaching" to each through prayer to God, or indirectly preaching about their family members, as in the case of Toni and Bobby cited above. The result is that if the prayer is not in alignment with God's will, it has the effect of cursing a relationship in some way or another. This is because the will of God is subjected to the presumption of the person praying a willful prayer; it is put into the "spiritual atmosphere" and affects the character of the interpersonal relationship: boundaries are crossed.

What can you do about this? Avoid prayers or ministries that are designed to gain relief from your personal angst concerning other persons. Start praying for them, with pure motives on your part, to have godly virtues. If you are the subject of this fleshly prayer, cut

the unholy bonds between you and that person praying everyday until you sense you are free. Pray God's virtues into yourself.

5. Occult practices: the prospect of spiritual death

Out of desperation, intrigue or misplaced curiosity, people can employ the use of witches, fortunetellers, New Age, paganism, esoteric spiritualities, Wicca, Ouija Boards or other practices in order to control situations and persons. Christians can and do fall prey to this. When this happens, the power of darkness (however it may be called according to the particular practice) is in one way or another called upon to reinforce the practices with spiritual or supernatural power, even though they don't realize it. This is a gross violation of spiritual boundaries. It attempts to muster the powers of darkness to annul human freedom – a grave threat to the Image of God. And it leads into the serious sin of idolatry. The enemy uses these things as a substitute for what God has revealed – the sacraments, the word of God and the charisms of the Holy Spirit. If you have engaged in any of these practices, unclean and unholy bonds have surely been established. Repent of and renounce these practices, confess the true faith, and cut the unclean bonds with anyone who has been involved in any way.

If you have been spiritually violated, or the object of any of these practices, make sure your covenant relationship with God is solid, accept in faith that the Lord Jesus has come to set free anyone entrapped by the devil, cut unholy ties with those who did it and seal yourself with the Blood of Jesus. Remember, as a person in covenant with God, you have the *right* to be totally free from any occult influence whatsoever; it cannot rightly touch you. Purpose to make any word spoken to you or any ritual performed in your regard *totally irrelevant* – as though it had never been spoken or done, no matter how true it seemed! No actions should be taken on the basis of guidance received through any occult practices.

The most important thing is to be living the covenant relationship as a Christian. It often happens that people ask me for help in this kind of deliverance while they are living a life at variance with God's word or outside the pastoral authority of the Church. Such an attitude betrays not faith but a superstitious or magical outlook on life. This leads us to our final consideration.

The ultimate boundary – the virtue of Christ Himself

The word of God declares that God "alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold, so that I stand unwavering" (Ps 62:6). How can you make God your Stronghold? When a Christian beholds the character of God, opens up to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and strives to become like Him, boundaries are made much clearer and easier. Such a person is clothed from on high and will maintain healthy and holy relationships: they stand unwavering in Him. The spiritual boundaries of the virtues of Jesus the Anointed One are beautiful because they reflect at the same time God's justice and His mercy; they show forth the nobility of His character. You can reflect this by discerning soberly where your spiritual boundaries need to be brought into right order. Stand firm in Him!

Please join me in prayer:

Heavenly Father, it is in your heart for me to live in a healthy and holy way. I want to be like you and like the One you sent, Jesus my Master, in your Image. I open myself and consent to live in your covenant. Help me to recognize when my spiritual boundaries have been violated and do what is necessary to establish holy bonds. Help me to recognize when I have abused others' boundaries and repent for it. I now purpose to respect the boundaries of others. I take the sword of the Spirit and I cut and sever all unclean and un-holy bonds between me and any person, place, thing, organization or other entity. Place a seal of the Blood of Jesus over me, and finally, renew in me the seal of the Holy Spirit and His mighty power. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."