

## **The Indispensability of Boundaries**

**November 30, 2017**

Thank you for coming, and we trust we will have that which is of profit for everyone who has taken time to be with us. Now the subject tonight, I think as was announced, is the indispensability of boundaries. We've looked together at the singularity of the foundation, at the centrality of the Lord's supper, and at the necessities for prayer. Now the indispensability of boundaries. In some ways, this is the place where the greatest attack has been made, and the greatest difficulty has arisen in the issue of boundaries. Now everyone is familiar, ever since doctors Henry Cloud and John Townsend began putting out all of their books on boundaries in different ways, with the concept of boundaries. And we need to be balanced even about boundaries, because Christianity is not about walls. It's also about doors. It's about having bridges built, that enable people to appreciate the truth of God, and to come to know Christ as savior. So when we're speaking of boundaries and walls we have to understand that they're not solid brick walls that no one can ever penetrate, but rather they are places of protection that God has placed around different things in the assembly.

Now my task really is twofold. I have to convince you first of all that God places tremendous value upon boundaries. And then we'll look at some of the boundaries God has established in a local assembly. So we're going to go back to Genesis chapter one. We are going to be very hurried, someone might refer to it as an unholy haste, through some of these early chapters, just to notice a few things and establish the principle of boundaries. Look at Genesis chapter one verse four, "And God saw the light that it was good and God divided the light from the darkness."

Look at verse seven. "God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under," and so on. I should have mentioned verse six, dividing the waters from the waters. Verse fourteen, "Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night." Verse eighteen, "to rule over the day and night and to divide light from darkness." Five times in Genesis chapter one God separates, he creates boundaries if you will, five times that same Hebrew word is used. There is the idea of separating, the idea of establishing boundaries, the idea of dividing, as we have in our English version. So we're introduced to the fact as early as Genesis chapter one, that in creation God was in the business of dividing: dividing waters, dividing light from darkness, dividing land from water, and so on.

So he was dividing and establishing boundaries. Now we won't look at the next place, but you recall when he gave the commandments concerning the tabernacle. There were boundaries. In fact, when Moses was up on the mount he told him to set a boundary, so the people wouldn't pass. Boundaries were for safety, boundaries were for sanctity. All of those things were established, even as early as Genesis and the book of Exodus. Turn quickly to Deuteronomy chapter nineteen and look at verse fourteen. Here is a clear command from God. Deuteronomy 19:14, "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark which they have old time set in an inheritance which they also inherit in the land the Lord thy God given to possess it."

So the landmark was establishing the boundary of a person's land—his inheritance. And God gave a clear command not to remove it. Then you come to chapter twenty-seven of this same book. And in chapter twenty-seven it moves from being a command to actually being a curse. Look at verse seventeen: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark, and all the people shall say, amen." Come to book of Proverbs, chapter twenty-two. Here we have the counsel of Solomon. Verse twenty-eight, "Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set." Then in the very next chapter, chapter twenty-three, look at verse ten, "Remove not the old landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless."

Now it wasn't just that they were old landmarks, and everything that is old is good and everything that is new is suspicious. But here were the boundaries God had given in the land, and God intended for those boundaries, those inheritances, to be passed on from generation to generation and to be kept inviolate, to be kept absolutely as God intended. Nothing lost, nothing added to, whether by nefarious deed or by acquisition in any other way. God intended the landmarks to be maintained. So there was a command, there was a curse, there is the counsel of the wisest man, and we have the fact that God was aware when landmarks were being removed. While we're there, just the very next chapter look at look at Proverbs twenty-four. It's probably worth just mentioning this while we're here.

Look at the end of chapter twenty-four, verse thirty. "I went by the field of the slothful by the vineyard of the man void of understanding and it was all grown over with thorns and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stone wall thereof was broken." So because the wall, the boundary, was broken down, what was outside the field was now inside the field. And so we have again the importance of a boundary line.

Look at Isaiah chapter five. Just a couple of books on looking at these in the order they were found. Isaiah chapter five. "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard my beloved hath a vineyard and a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it and gathered out the stones."

Again, a clear boundary to define what belonged inside the vineyard, and what was outside the vineyard and to mark what belonged to the owner of the vineyard as being clearly his. So I think that without going further, we have established (and I think we can establish if we need to, even more) the fact that God desires boundaries. The principle of boundaries is present throughout the word of God.

But what about the purpose of boundaries? It's enough to say God wants boundaries, and if all we had was God's command that should be enough. But God has also given us some insight into the purpose of boundaries. And I think all of us can appreciate that when something is valuable we protect it. We protect it in any way we can. If you are in some of the countries that others here of travel to countries like Mexico or Central America or South America one of the very first things people do when they begin to build a house is to build a wall, even before the construction begins.

A wall is built to protect what is going to be built because it's valuable, and you don't want it to be marred or hindered. And we protect what is valuable. A marriage

is valuable and the word of God instructs us to protect a marriage. It tells us very clearly that no one is to be closer than a spouse. That's the closest relationship, nothing comes in between, it is protected. It is has a boundary and no one is allowed to enter into that boundary. For the sake of some just coming in we appreciate you coming the long distance where we're looking at the indispensability of boundaries and a local assembly that God has established boundaries and we've taken a minute to show that in the old testament God time and again stresses the importance of boundaries and landmarks and so on.

Now we're looking at the purpose of boundaries. It is because things are valuable and God wants them to be protected. But also not only because things are valuable, but because things are vulnerable. If what is out there gets in here there is that tremendous possibility of it hindering fruitfulness and growth. And so we read there in Proverbs twenty-four that because there was no wall, because the boundary had fallen down, the thorns and nettles that were outside came into a field that was once cultivated and now it was fruitless.

And so because of the vulnerability of what is inside, and because of how valuable what is inside is, God says, I want I want a boundary. I want to protect what is mine. I want to protect what is so valuable but also I want to protect what is so vulnerable. And so when you come to new testament epistles, you find in Second John, the only letter written to a lady, written to the elect lady, written to the choice lady, John instructs her, don't allow those individuals into your home. There's a boundary. And those who come with a doctrine other than Christ are not to be invited in. Don't even bid them godspeed. Jude reminds us of men who are trying to creep in through side doors to bring in false teaching. Keep the boundary up, he says in those in those epistles. And so we are reminded that we are vulnerable.

All you need is a charismatic, attractive, eloquent individual coming in and being beginning to sway opinion and sway things and we could be affected. So there is the valuable; there is the vulnerable; and also, he says, you are a visible testimony for me. You are a visible testimony that everyone looks upon and *from* a local church. I don't know if we grasp this enough—*from* a local church, and the very way in which it functions there is a revelation given of the character of God. For example just take one strain of that. You recall in chapter fourteen that we'll be looking at in a few moments, there was disorder in the assembly. There was the confusion of multiple people taking part and trying to rival each other with their tongues, and he says, God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Let everything be done decently and in order because you are displaying the character of God in the very nature the very means by which you function. So confusion and an all that goes with it, that's totally contrary to the character of God. He says you are a visible representation of my character, and I want you to faithfully give testimony to my character. So boundaries, because of how valuable we are to God, how vulnerable we are in ourselves, how visible we are to the world; God says I want things preserved, and I'm going to establish boundaries that will clarify and will enable others to appreciate all of these truths.

Now most here, with or who have had families, people in business people who are in important jobs, know that boundaries create security. I mean, that's one of the one of the biggest, fastest, most lucrative professions to go into today is various forms of security. Universities spend millions of dollars to bring about security, to have boundaries where people can go, where they can't go, where passes are needed, where keys are needed, where swipes are needed. Security is the result of boundaries. Boundaries also give stability to things and boundaries also give safety to us as well. So all of those things are involved that God wants boundaries.

So the principle of boundaries, the purposes of boundaries, the peril of neglecting boundaries. Each of us instinctively have boundaries in our lives. Whether we are aware of it or not, life without boundaries is an absolutely chaotic, maddening type of life. We all have boundaries to our homes, who can come in who can come out.

But more importantly, as believers we have boundaries, relative to, number one, our hearts. The word that Solomon uses in Proverbs four, a well-known verse, "Keep thy heart with all keeping above all keeping for all of it are the issues of life." That word 'issues' is the same word that is used throughout the book of Joshua for the borders of the land. In other words, the borders of my life, the boundaries of my life, are going to be determined by how well I keep my heart.

But as well, not only is it a matter of my heart. He says, make sure, like the psalmist says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." He says, make sure your horizons have a boundary. That the only thing you want in life is to please God. The only thing you want in life is to honor the Lord Jesus. So that every decision, every choice, at every crossroads you come to, you bring into the presence of God, and ask, will this please Lord Jesus? Is this going to honor him in my life? And so in all of those many different ways we are coming to realize that we have boundaries. Boundaries that affect our hearts, boundaries that affect our hands, our service for God, boundaries that affect our horizons. All of that is vital in our own personal lives. But we're looking at boundaries in assembly life.

And I'm just going to deal with three areas, and you may want to add one or two in your own meditation. But I want to deal with boundaries about the gathering, boundaries between the genders, and boundaries in the use of gifts. Very simple. And very straightforward. Nothing earth shattering or a great revelation. These are things most surely believed amongst us, but we just need to reiterate them, underline them, and show their scriptural basis. The boundary as to the gathering is submission to lordship. Boundary relative to the genders is submission to leadership. And boundary relative to gift (and I'll have to explain this) is really submission to love, as we'll see.

So just with those things before us and we'll look at them quickly and just try to give some salient points for the meeting. As far as the boundary and the gathering. Three things: the fellowship and its basis, the fellowship and its barriers, and the fellowship and the bread that we partake of.

Now we touched the bit on that the other night. I know some of these things will be repetitive, but that's not bad because not everyone's here every single night. Now what do we mean by the basis. Come then to Acts chapter two and verse forty-one. These are so familiar and often preached on, often taught, we are just bringing together a few things here.

Look at verse forty-one. "Then they gladly receive his word were baptized. And the same day were added unto them three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Now that truth created a fellowship. And in the fellowship, that fellowship was expressed in the breaking of bread. And that fellowship then was sustained by prayer. So you have you have a continuum here in verse number forty-two, they were saved, baptized, and they continued in the apostles' doctrine. It brought them into fellowship. It was expressed in the breaking of bread and was maintained, energized, strengthened by prayer.

Now, this may sound like a very simple thing to say, but it has tremendous value. Fellowship is not something we agree to have. Fellowship is something we have because we agree. Now there's a world of difference between those two statements. Fellowship is not something we agree to have, that we sit down and compromise and work out our differences, and say, well now if you don't mention that, I won't mention this, and if you don't talk on this, I won't talk on that. And we'll have fellowship. Fellowship is not something that we agree to have. It is something we have because we agree. And the measure of fellowship we can have is dependent upon how much we agree upon.

And that doesn't mean we have to agree on every specific item of prophecy as to the future. And that doesn't mean we have to agree on every interpretation of every verse in the Bible. We can all have our own views of certain things. But we are agreeing about the basic doctrines of the word of God, and agreeing about the principles of assembly gathering. So we mentioned the other night, in First Corinthians chapter one, Paul writes, the people who were saved, who were separated, who were saints, and who were submissive to the lordship of Christ. Here we see them saved. They are submissive to the lordship of Christ. They are baptized. They are gathered together, sanctified, set apart. And we see them here, carrying out the character of a new testament assembly. Those who are agreed as to the truth of God and it brought them into a fellowship together and they express that fellowship by breaking bread.

This brings us not just to the basis for fellowship, but it brings us to the barriers of fellowship. Because if this is the basis, then some of the opposite things become barriers. Number one. Do I have the right link? You may say, what do I mean? Are you converted? Are you saved? Now you may say, that's obvious, isn't it. You've got to bring that up? Well, we do have to bring that up. That's the first thing here. Here's a barrier. If a person has not been genuinely reached and saved then they really cannot become part of a local testimony for God. So they have to have the right link.

Number two, how about their life? Is their life clean? Remember that the assembly in its character is revealing to the onlooking world something of the character of God. If the people out there wanted to know what God was like and came in and viewed us

what impression would they get? "He sounds very sanctimonious here but you should see him at work. You'd see the jokes he tells and the language he uses and some of the things he does." Now what about the life? Is the life clean? Now, that doesn't mean sinlessness and it doesn't mean that somehow perfection has been attained but it just means that I am seeking to live my life, I am submitting it to the claims of the lordship of Christ, and obeying his word wherever it cuts across my path.

Lordship implies obedience. Remember that was the complaint of Pharaoh when Moses went in and said, "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, let my people go." Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" Lordship Implies—and really, not only implies, requires—obedience and submission. So some might say, I'm saved but I'm not baptized. I really don't want to be baptized. Well, submission to lordship means obedience. So it's not that baptism is a door to the assembly, or baptism is on the checklist so you can get into the assembly. Baptism is linked with salvation. It's linked with obedience to the lordship of Christ.

And so we're looking for that, we're looking for steps of obedience, steps of bowing to lordship claims in an individual's life. But it's not just enough to be saved, to have the right link, to have the right kind of life. He makes it very clear that the fellowship was the result of not just of life saved but of light: the apostles' doctrine. They agreed about truth. Now that does not mean again that someone who is asking for assembly fellowship has to be able to answer all the hard questions the brethren place before them. But there should be an appreciation for what an assembly is, the distinctiveness of it, and what it stands for and why it exists and to whom we're gathered. So there should be some appreciation relative to new testament assembly teaching. So if they don't have the right link with Christ, if they don't have the right kind of life, if they have no light about what an assembly is all about, then those are barriers.

But if they have those things and they show that right kind of submissive spirit then the boundary that is around the gathering that the door is opened and the individual is welcomed in to be part of an assembly fellowship.

But then we spoke about the bread and the fellowship. And we mentioned the other night, in First Corinthians chapter ten, "The bread which we break, is it not our communion in the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." So he's saying that really, the bread is symbolic of two things: that in the loaf of bread from which we take, we are confessing that that body was given for us. We are identifying with the Lord Jesus in his death.

Now for us, sitting in the twenty-first century western world it's not a very not a very dangerous thing to do. But in first century Corinth, the first century Roman world, first century pagan society it could be a very dangerous thing. Because you are, once a year supposed to take your pinch of incense and offer it to Caesar and say Caesar is lord. But instead of taking a pinch of incense and saying Caesar is lord, if you are taking the loaf recognizing Christ as your lord, you are risking your life to be identified with the Lord Jesus in that simple way.

But he says, along with identifying yourself with Christ you're doing something else. He says, you are identifying yourself with everyone else who partakes of that bread. He says, we being many are one bread, one body. We are all partakers of that one loaf. So as the bread goes around we are confessing that we are all part of the fellowship, and we are in fellowship with each other.

Paul says in chapter five that there is a within and there is a without. Now when he comes to chapter fourteen, notice carefully his wording. "If the whole church is gathered together." So everyone's together. "And there come in." So now someone is coming in who's not part of the local church. Someone who is unsaved or unlearned. And they see the disorder that is going on. They'll think you're mad. The unlearned man, if he's able to appreciate what is going on, is able to say amen as you rise and worship. So he has life, and he has a light, but he's called unlearned.

You come down the chapter, and he says, if all prophesy and all are edified, he that occupies the room of the unlearned will fall down and acknowledge that God is in you of a truth.

Now there's been lots of ink spilled over who the unlearned is, and lots of verbiage that you can read. A lot that is being said today in contemporary writing says that the unlearned man is one who did not understand the foreign tongue. Though that sounds nice on the surface, the problem with it is if we were to be consistent through the chapter, that means the entire assembly is unlearned because the one speaking was speaking in a tongue no one knew. So it can't be that he did not know the tongue, because neither then did the people in the assembly know the tongue. What is he unlearned about? He's unlearned about the very thing he learned—that God is in you of truth. That's what he had to learn, that this is God's place of residence on earth, a local church. This is where I belong.

So there is an outside and an inside, and those who do not appreciate the character of an assembly are not inferior Christians. They are not somehow second rate Christians. They are not being penalized or put in the penalty box as though this were a hockey game.

When they're asked to observe the Lord's Supper, it's for their protection, as well as the assembly's, because when they partake of that loaf what they're telling God and everyone else is, I agree with everyone else here. If they have no idea what you agree about, then when they take of that bread they're really jeopardizing themselves because they don't know what you agree with. So to just hastily bring someone in, to say, you're a dear beloved Christian, do come in and join with us, is exposing that person to the potential of lying as he partakes of that loaf. Because if he is not in fellowship with the assembly, and all the assembly stands for, he is actually telling an untruth in his action. So it is for his protection. It is for the assembly's protection as well. It is not being judgmental, not being critical, not acting in a superior way.

There should be nothing about our behavior or our attitude that would make that individual think that somehow they are less valued, that somehow they are less of a Christian or on a peg lower on our spiritual standing. Nothing of that nature. Explaining to them is a difficulty, no question, but it is vital to do that because the confession we are making and the unity that marks us as we meet together as a local assembly is expressed in that bread that we take from. So there is the basis for fellowship. There are the barriers for fellowship. There is the bread and the fellowship.

Just a word about the behavior and the fellowship. Corinth was at a strategic place along the isthmus. They were ideally located. You know the real estate people say location, location, location. They had location, location, location for import-export trade across the isthmus. There was a desire to avoid having to go all the way down around the Peloponnese, and trade would be taken across the isthmus from one ship to another. So they were in the import-export trade. And it was a big deal.

Unfortunately in the assembly they were exporting and importing things that never should have been exported or imported. They were exporting law cases to the judicial system of the day. Paul says that that belongs inside. Don't send it outside. And they were going out to the idols' temples. Paul says, don't go out to the idols' temples. Stay inside. And of course they were taking things on the outside and bringing them in.

And so the sin of Corinth was coming in: the immorality, the idolatry was coming in, the competitiveness was coming in, the philosophy was coming in, the attraction to the sensational was coming in; so that the boundary was being stressed. In their behavior they were taking things that belonged inside the assembly and taking them out. And they were bringing things outside the assembly—their big feasts, their wonderful dinners—they were bringing them into the assembly, and shaming those that didn't. He said, get your boundaries right. Your behavior. So a boundary concerning the gathering.

A boundary then concerning the genders. Now we need to have three different spheres in mind here. There is creation order, there is congregational order, and there is church order, meaning church the body of Christ, not the local church.

In creation, as we mentioned I think last night, God gave headship and leadership to Adam. He gave it to him *before* the fall. It was not after the fall. Some have tried to argue that Adam only became head after the fall. And so with redemption, all that is done away and there is no longer this idea of headship and submission, because redemption has changed all that. It was given before the fall. It was God's original intention. To Adam was given a privilege. Up until a critical moment in time, everything that was named was named by God.

God called the light day, and he called the darkness night. So God does all the naming. Now, God says, Adam, I want you to name the animals. And then Adam names all the animals, and then Adam names his wife, so Adam was given that image-bearing responsibility before the fall. To Adam was given the instructions relative to replenishing the earth. He was given the instruction relative to the tree. Everything was

channeled through Adam. In chapters one and two. So God's original intention in creation is leadership in the man and the place of help on the part of the sister.

Now just so you don't think that being a help is somehow really kind of a pat on the head, like you're a little puppy dog, a little consolation prize. Far from that. You take your Bible, take your concordance, and look up that word help. Begin with Genesis two, "I will make him an help suitable for him." You know where you'll find it? You'll find it scattered throughout the old testament, in verses like this: "Shall I look unto the hills? From whence cometh my help? My help comes from the Lord." Multiple times God refers to himself as a help to the nation of Israel. Is that a subsidiary role? Secondary place? Inferiority? God took that place with the nation. God viewed himself as a help to the nation of Israel. So God brought woman along to enable man to carry out his leadership, and to be everything God intended him to be. She has a separate spiritual life just as valuable as a man's. She has just as much value in the eye of God. She just has a different role within the hierarchy of God's plan for planet earth. So in creation order there is this distinction in roles of leadership and of being a help.

Now congregationally, God says (First Timothy chapter two, First Corinthians chapter eleven, First Corinthians chapter fourteen), I want that order to be maintained, if nowhere else in the world, in local congregations of believers.

So I don't know if we should read all of the scriptures, or look at them all, but in First Corinthians chapter eleven, the sister is enjoined for her place with her long hair and with her head covering and with her silence. In First Corinthians fourteen, it's with her silence again. And in First Timothy chapter two, her silence, her submission, her attire. All of that is brought before us. I should maybe mention just for the sake of clarity. Some have a question, because they read in First Corinthians chapter eleven, that woman, if she's going to pray or prophesy, needs to have her head covered. And they'll say, you will see right there, it says she was praying and prophesying. The only problem was, she was doing it without her head covered.

How does that square, then, with chapter fourteen, or First Timothy chapter two, where Paul says she's not to speak? She's not to pray? She is not to ask questions. How do those two things fit? To my mind, it's relatively easily explained. First Corinthians chapter eleven is all about headship. So when a brother gets up to pray, he is representing every sister in the assembly. And as he prays, every sister is seen praying. He represents as head and as he is speaking to God he is speaking on behalf of the sisters. He is representing them and they are seen praying. And so Paul says, how can a sister pray with her head uncovered?

And he's really just showing us that headship involves representation. So the public role of responsibility is given to the males in the assembly, and there is a private supportive role for sisters.

I think we need to face the reality that women receive far more accolades for their relationships with Christ than men do. Far more faithful, far more perceptive. In fact, in the last week of the Lord's life, when men were falling all over themselves with failure, women shone. The widow with two mites; Mary with her box of ointment.

The women that come to the tomb, and the women that stood at the cross. So in the last week of his life, women came to the fore when men failed. So there is not the idea of any way that somehow women are being given a place of private support or role because they can't do more. No, women could come to the fore; they did.

You remember that Lois and Eunice taught Timothy at home. You recall that Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos home to teach. You recall that Philip's daughters, who were prophets, prophesied at home. You recall that in Titus chapter two, the older sisters are told to teach the younger sisters. There is no public role for a woman teaching, even a woman teaching other women. The public role is never given to sisters. Public role is always in the hands of men.

A private, personal, needed ministry is committed to sisters. Now, the problem the most sisters have, is it says the "older sisters," and I'm not old yet so I can't do it. I could use fifty as the cutoff but I won't do that today. Very sensitive subject for some. But whoever you are, if there's a sister younger than you are, then that's someone you should be mentoring on a private, personal basis.

Now I think it's fairly obvious when you're reading this, why Paul had to tell Titus that the the older sisters teach the younger sisters. Number one, what they were teaching them was about children, about husbands, about home life, about honoring God in the home. And it would be out of place for Titus, a young man, to be meeting with the sisters. The word of God is very careful about boundaries between the genders. It goes to great lengths to protect and to avoid any possibility of anything being misconstrued. So Titus is not to meet with the young sisters, and begin telling them about family life and married life. Likely he couldn't do it, and it would be awkward for him. So it's for the older women to be with the younger women. And it is a private, personal type of approach that is mentioned in Titus and is enjoined to our sisters. Not a public role of preaching; not having a conference for women. Not having a large gathering for women and preaching away. If nothing else, that would set up a venue for teaching outside of the sphere of the control of the oversight. That may seem like a small thing, but it has the potential, even if good people start it, it has the potential for being taken in a different direction by another group.

Our sisters do preach. They preach silently. With their heads covered, with their submissive attitude, they are preaching. We mentioned that last night, we mentioned that the night before, I think, that they are proclaiming to angels, proclaiming to others, their willingness, their intelligent submission and their place. And they are telling, proclaiming, the coming headship of Christ over the entire globe. That's a message worth preaching. That's a message worth giving utterance to by your heads being covered, that we are recognizing that a day is coming when Christ as head will rule over all. And be overall. So there is the silence, yet silence which is eloquent, and silence which preaches. So there is the creation order, there is the congregational order.

But then confusion occurs because people come to verses like Galatians chapter three, where, it says, there is neither bond nor free, male or female, Scythian or" so on, and people say, you see, redemption has done away with all the distinctions.

You're making distinctions, you're putting boundaries between the genders, and Galatians says there are none.

Well of course in the church the body of Christ when it comes to blessings what he's talking about there are blessings and privileges that come as a result of redemption. What he's saying is, when it comes to blessings, there is no distinction whatsoever. Every believer enjoys the very same blessings as a result of what Christ has done.

Put another way, every believer positionally is absolutely equal. Our position in Christ has nothing to do with gender, nothing to do with nationality, nothing even to do with my measure of spirituality. They are blessings brought to me on the basis of all that Christ has done. And the only thing I am called upon to do is to enjoy them, to appropriate them, to appreciate them. But male and female, no distinction when it comes to our blessings in the body of Christ. We have the same blessings together.

Let me quickly come not only to boundaries around the gathering, boundaries between the genders, but boundaries around gift. Now maybe it would be good here to read one or two verses. First Corinthians 14:3. "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men, to edification, to exhortation, and to comfort."

There is the boundary about what I am doing when I am opening the word of God. I am either edifying, exhorting, or comforting. There is no place for entertainment. Now there's nothing wrong with the occasional story to break the strain of a meeting or to break the intensity of a meeting. But we're not here to entertain. We're here to either exhort, edify, or comfort.

Look down the chapter still further. That's one boundary that we have to be very conscious of. The purpose of getting up and the purpose of gift. Look at verse number twelve. "Even so, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." Again, the emphasis there upon edification. Verse sixteen, "Also if thou shall bless with the spirit shall he that occupies the room with the unlearned say amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understands not what thou sayest." It's very simple thing. Now I know this is talking about a tongue. But make sure when you speak you're audible and understandable. Don't mumble. Make sure you're audible. You are representing the assembly in whatever sphere, whether it's teaching, whether it's preaching, whether it's praying, whether it's worshipping. Make sure that others can follow and intelligently say amen at they giving of thanks.

Look down at verse twenty-seven.

"If any man speak in a tongue let it be by two or the most by three that by course let one interpret if there are no interpreter then him keep silence in the church. Let him speak to himself and to God. Let the prophets speak by two or three. Let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by let the first hold his peace. All may prophesy one by one. All may learn all may be comforted and the

spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." So not only edification but consideration.

It's not all about me having to get up every single Sunday and have my say and preach it. This is not a one man ministry. This is not one man who dominates. We're reminded here of consideration for others, making room for others, appreciating the gift of others. All of that is involved here. Just a word for the sake of young Christians, young men, about identifying your gifts. Now I know that's not what we have here but I just want to just use this as a moment just to give a little bit of help here. Identifying my gift. How will I know. OK. Our gifts are circumscribed. They are always for the benefit of others. We mentioned we read that there edifying of others. Gift is always for others. That's helpful to grasp, because it does away with a lot of the charismatic confusion that unless you've spoken with tongues and had that blessing, you're really not filled with the spirit. Or unless you've done miracles you're really not enjoying Christian blessing. A gift is never given to me for myself. A gift is never given to me for confirmation. A gift is never given to me as assurance. A gift is never given to me to go through an experience. Every gift that we are given is to minister to others. First Peter chapter four, "Ministering the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." So gifts are always for others.

That's the first thing. Second thing is this. To sweat out what is my gift is the go at things the wrong way. Listen to what the Lord Jesus Christ does. I only have two minutes. Quickly here. Listen to what the Lord Jesus Christ does. He's calling men, and he says to a group of fishermen, "Follow me, and I will make you...." Get the order? You follow. I'll take care of the making. So just some advice to some of the young men and young women here. If you would like to know what God has in store for your life, how you can be useful for him, you begin by following Christ. You begin by following him, and he will make you what he wants you to be. He'll do it. His promise.

He's the exalted head who pours out upon his body gifts and he will shape you through experiences. Now that does not mean that we swim along like helpless individuals and just wait for things to happen. There does need to be on our part an awareness of need, an availability to meet that need, an activity in that need, an approachability, as individuals try to encourage us as to whether we ought to be doing this or not.

But finding my gift is secondary to following Christ. That's the key thing as I become more comfortable with what God has given me to do, then these principles come into play. The boundaries God has given.

Functioning in a local church, functioning for the benefit and blessing of others, functioning either in edification, exhortation, or comfort when it comes to the public handling of the word of God. And then the other boundaries we could have looked at in Romans chapter nine, being a help, being an encouragement; the myriad of ways that all of us can contribute to the local assembly by the ability God has given. So we'll have to leave it there. Time has gone. We trust God bless his word.

Boundaries, again, are not solid brick walls. Boundaries exist for safety, for security, for stability. But in those walls, there are also doors, bridges to reach out to a needy world, to display the character of God, to protect what is valuable, to preserve what is vulnerable, to maintain visibility that is in keeping with all that God is that he might be glorified by our assembly.