

## DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLE #18

Lk. 10:3 / Phil. 2:15 / 2 Thess. 1:4

### DRAWING GOD'S LINES IN MY RELATIONSHIPS

What are **my boundaries** in regard to what I can and cannot do as I serve Christ here in this fallen world? And what are **the lines** I must draw in regard to what **others** can and cannot do in our relationship with one another? This is perhaps the most complex subject of our discipleship studies, because of the many variables involved.

When, for example, do I say “No, you cannot” to the conduct of others in the midst of this fallen world? How do I both love and accept my enemy and yet hate evil and reject being associated with it? When do I adjust my own life, for a season, for the sake of an immature member of my church and when do I confront him with the truth? When do I obey the government and when do I say, “I cannot, I will not” for God has instructed me otherwise?

Furthermore, how do I draw these lines? With what attitudes? Are they important? They are! For,

*<sup>24</sup> the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but **be kind** to all, able to teach, **patient** when wronged, <sup>25</sup> **with gentleness** correcting those who are in opposition.*  
— 2 Tim. 2:24-25

These complex issues are addressed in God's Word to us regarding our many relationships as servants of Christ, members of His church, citizens in a nation, part of a family, living in the world, and facing our adversary. The decisions we make regarding these issues are among the most important and the most difficult to discern and obey that we make as Christ's disciples.

So, let us:

1. Establish **the principles** regarding the lines or boundaries we are to draw in our relationships. When are we to say, “I cannot” or “You cannot”? Where are the lines?
2. Clarify **our instructions regarding how** we are to draw these lines. What has God said about our motives, our attitudes, and our methods in doing this?

## The Principles Regarding Our Behavioral And Relational Lines In Life

### 1. God is a line-drawer in His relationship with us.

God drew a line in the garden of Eden and told Adam and Eve of the consequences if they “came across the line”. These dire consequences still impact every one of their descendants eternally unless they accept God’s invitation to cross another line and come in faith to the cross of Christ. (See Gen.1 and Mt. 11:28-30)

### 2. God draws the lines for His people as they serve Him in this world.

<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**” <sup>38</sup> This is the great and foremost commandment.”  
— Matt 22:36-38

He is our Lord and we are to love Him. He gets to determine everything. He is the Boss.

Daniel and his friends illustrate this in Daniel 1, 3, and 6. God had told them to draw **personal lines** regarding what they could eat, who they would worship, and their prayer life, regardless of the consequences. They faced a human authority that had instructed them otherwise.

When they were challenged about saying “no, I cannot, I will not”, they attributed this to God. They had **personal convictions**, personal lines they could not cross regarding what they would and would not do, because God had so instructed them.

Peter and John give us another clear example of this in Acts 4 when they were told to stop doing what God had instructed them to do.

<sup>18</sup> And when the Council had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; <sup>20</sup> for **we cannot** stop speaking what we have seen and heard.”  
— Acts 4:18-20

Now, let us distinguish between a personal **conviction** and a personal **preference**. A conviction, for a Christian, is a biblical principle or command that he or she purposes to keep regardless of the circumstances. A preference, in contrast, is a biblical principle or command that we purpose to keep – as long as the consequences are not too costly. Christians with strong convictions are rare. Many drift with the downstream current of the culture and take their lines with them.

### 3. God also gets to draw the lines in our relationships with others.

Now it starts to get complex. We are called, not only to love God with all of our heart and live for Him, but we are faced with this:

<sup>17</sup> “*This I command you, that you **love one another.***” — John 15:17

- We are not to draw the lines in our relationships with others solely, or even principally, for our own sake, but for the sake of the other person. Paul’s instructions in Romans 14 and 15 address this challenge.

<sup>14:13</sup> *Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. [Because of his convictions that are immature and not biblical]* <sup>14</sup> **I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean...** <sup>8:13</sup> *Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.* — Rom. 14:13-14; 1 Cor. 8:13

So, when we want to say, “I cannot, I will not”, or “You cannot, you will not” in one of our relationships, we must take into consideration the other person, their maturity and knowledge. We are to love them, considering them more important than ourselves. However...

- **Setting clear boundaries or behavioral lines for the conduct of others in our relationships is certainly also to be done.**

<sup>11</sup> *I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler- not even to eat with such a one.* <sup>12</sup> *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?* <sup>13</sup> *But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.* — 1 Cor. 5:11-13

(See also: 2 Thess. 3:6,14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 10:14; Mt. 18:17; Prov. 14:7; 20:19; 22:24; and 24:21)

When does a wife say to an abusive husband, “You cannot, you will not” and, as necessary, “I cannot, I will not”? When does she leave for safety and get help? There is a time. When do we say “No, I cannot, I will not” to the governing authorities that we are to obey? There is a time. When do we say, “No, you cannot, you will not” to a friend? There is a time. When do we say “I cannot, I will not” to our church leaders that we are to hear, heed, obey, and submit to? There is a time.

God’s will must be sought in all of our relationships, at all times. Thankfully, He has promised us that:

<sup>8</sup> *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.* — Psalm 32:8

<sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* <sup>6</sup> *But let him ask in faith without any doubting.* — James 1:5-6

<sup>8</sup> *Good and upright is the LORD. Therefore, He instructs sinners in the way.* <sup>9</sup> *He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way...* <sup>12</sup> *Who is the man who fears the LORD? **He will instruct him in the way he should choose.*** — Psalm 25:8-12

#### 4. How we draw the lines in our relationships is very important to God.

- **Parents** are to draw lines in their relationship with their children. Indeed, the primary role of a parent is to teach their children to hear and heed God’s lines.

<sup>4</sup> *Fathers bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* — Eph. 6:4

But, in doing this essential task, they are not to “provoke their to anger” by disciplining them in an inappropriate manner.

- **Pastors and Elders** are called upon to reprove, rebuke, exhort, admonish, and correct those they are assigned to, to build them up in the faith by word and example. But the **manner** of doing this is to be heeded.

<sup>24</sup> *The Lord's bond-servant [Paul is writing to Timothy about the manner of performing his Pastoral duties] must not be quarrelsome, but **be kind** to all, able to teach, **patient when wronged**, <sup>25</sup> with **gentleness** correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.* — 2 Tim. 2:24-26

- **Citizens** must draw lines with governments that require them to do what God has said they cannot (e.g. Acts 4, Dan. 1, 3, 6 as we have seen) but this is to be done with respect and appropriate honor.

<sup>1</sup>As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup>**for kings and all who are in authority**, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

— 1 Tim. 2:1-3

- **Slaves** like Daniel and his friends in captivity in Babylon were not, and still are not, uncommon situations for Christians to face. There are lines to be drawn here also, but the **manner** of drawing them is clear here also. Imagine Paul's encouragement to Onesimus regarding this as he sent him back to Philemon.

<sup>5</sup>Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup>not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

— Eph. 6:5-6

If Christian slaves can do this by God's grace and power as slaves, surely we can draw the boundaries in our relationships with these same attitudes and responses. May God be seen as we do.

## 5. What happens if we do not draw the lines God wants us to draw?

- Other people, who we should not allow to do this, begin to control part of, or a lot of our life, whether it is our thinking, our time, our actions, or our other relationships.

<sup>14</sup>Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm;... <sup>15</sup>**Be on guard against him** yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.

— 2 Tim. 4:14-15

<sup>17</sup>Now I urge you, brethren, **keep your eye on** those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and **turn away from** them. <sup>18</sup>For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. <sup>19</sup>For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.

— Rom. 16:17-19

<sup>8</sup>**See to it that no one takes you captive** through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

— Col. 2:8

- Others do not face the “consequences” that would be good for them, because you are not establishing the boundaries you should.

We are called upon to influence others for their good. This includes correction, reproof, rebuke, exhortation, and admonition. Drawing appropriate lines in our relationship with others is what doing these things is. We cannot make choices for them, but we must make the choices that God leads us to make in the relationship, regardless of their response.

<sup>14</sup> *Concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and **able also to admonish one another.*** — Rom 15:14

<sup>24</sup> *Be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,* <sup>25</sup> *with gentleness **correcting** those who are in opposition...* — 2 Tim 2:24-25

As Christians we face a double task, a balancing challenge, of drawing BOTH God’s lines of holiness and God’s love, simultaneously! Exhibiting God’s love without His holiness is only compromise, and exhibiting His holiness without His love is just harshness. Our goal, by His grace, is to do both well, at the same time, that the Father may be seen and glorified by what we do.

<sup>16</sup> *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.* — Matt. 5:16

## **UNIT 18 STUDY SESSION #1**

In preparation for the group study of this principle of living for Christ, read and study the above scriptures and summary and then complete the following self-evaluation.

### **Evaluating The Lines I Have Drawn In My Life And Relationships**

1. Most of the time, others determine what I do in life. I go with the flow. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I draw boundaries in my life depending on the consequences of doing it. \_\_\_\_\_
3. To what activities have you said, "I cannot"? \_\_\_\_\_  
When did you do this? \_\_\_\_\_  
What has been the result in your life? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How have you handled the intrusion of TV, Cell Phones, and the Internet to consume your time and control your mind? \_\_\_\_\_
5. There are people in my life that I know I need to say "You cannot" but I have not. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Discussion Questions for Unit 18 Study Session #1**

1. Have you lost any relationships because you drew God's lines in your life?
2. Have you lost any relationships because you drew God's lines in the wrong way?
3. What does a church that draws lines of love without lines of truth look like?
4. What does a church that draws lines of truth without lines of love look like?
5. We are told to leave the presence of fools ( Prov. 14:7, 13:20), and avoid immoral people (1 Cor. 5:4), those who cause dissensions (Rom. 16:17), and creeps (2 Tim. 3:5). Reasons are given. Can you give examples from your life of doing this?
6. In Daniel Chapter 1 we are told that Daniel drew a line based on his personal convictions as God had led him. The manner in which he did this is also revealed. He made an appeal to his authority that was successful. Why was it successful?

### **Prayer Together**

## **UNIT 18 STUDY SESSION #2**

In preparation for the second study session please consider doing the following project:

- Think through the primary relationships that you currently have, using the principles noted in this study of Drawing God's Lines of truth and love, and commit to take those steps in each that you are convicted about.

### **Discussion Questions for Unit 18 Study Session #2**

1. If you were able to pursue the application project, can you share with us how it is going?
2. How do I know if God wants me to tolerate an issue – or address it and draw a line?
3. How do I handle disagreements on saying “no” with my family and my church? How do I draw my lines in my relationship with them, when we cannot agree on drawing other lines?
4. How do the consequences of drawing lines in my relationships relate to several of the other principles of living for Christ we have already studied: bitterness and forgiveness, responding to authority, and avoiding and opposing corrupting influences?
5. Our rapidly changing and declining culture is disruptive to our relationships at all levels. How can we help one another as we face this?

### **Prayer Together**