3 Boundary Problems

Boundaries, as we have seen, provide the freedom that we need for our spiritual growth and our ability to give and receive love. Most people, however, have problems with boundaries, because setting appropriate boundaries is not easy and respecting the boundaries of others is equally difficult. In this section we will study the main types of boundary problems and the reasons why people experience them.
Recall that the central function of boundaries is to protect our soul from bad influences while allowing it to be nurtured by what God provides for us. They shall keep the bad out and let the good in. They enable us to say "*no*" to the things that are not beneficial for us and to accept what is good for us. There are four possible types of problems that people can have with boundaries, illustrated by the following table.

Difficulty	Saying	Accepting
No	Compliant	Controller
Yes	Nonresponsive	Avoidant

- *Compliance* means saying "yes" to the bad.
  Compliants fail to set limits and will often feel guilty of controlled by others.
- *Avoidance* means saying "no" to the good.
  Avoidants fail to open their gate for the love and care of others.
- *Other-Control* is failing to respect the "no" of others.
  Controllers violate the boundaries of others either aggressively or by manipulation.
- *Unresponsiveness* means failing to give love to others.
  Nonresponsives don't hear the needs of others and neglect their responsibility to give care and help.

Remember when we talked about loads and burdens. According to **Galatians 6:2** we are to help each other carrying the huge boulders that life occasionally throws at us. But **Galatians 6:5** reminds us to carry our daily loads ourselves. *Compliants* always find themselves carrying the daily loads of others because they can't say *no*, while *controllers* try to make others carry even their daily. In contrast to that *avoidants* attempt to shoulder even the heaviest burdens themselves because they have difficulty to say *yes* to help, while *nonresponsives* even refuse to help when the other's burden clearly becomes unbearable.

We will now look at these four types of problems in detail. One should, however, keep in mind that some people may have problems in several of these areas at once. People can be compliant, avoiding, and controlling at the same time.

3.1 Compliance

The most obvious type of boundary problems is the difficulty to say *no* to others. Children, in particular girls, often grow up in an environment that teaches them that saying *no* is bad and that giving in to the demands of others means avoiding conflicts. Of course, parents have to teach their children obedience and good manners. But often they neglect the fact that some day they will send their children into a world that contains much evil. Evil in the form of controlling and manipulative people and in the form of temptations.

To feel safe in such a world, children need to have the power to say things like *"I disagree"*, *"I will not"*, *"Stop that"*, *"This is wrong"*, *"It hurts"*, or *"I don't like it"*. Blocking a child's ability to say no even to its own parents will handicap that child for life, because as an adult it will still say yes to everything.

Christian women are probably the ones that are most strongly affected by this type of boundary conflict, because they were trained to be submissive and obedient and grow up feeling that in some sense they are inferior to men. Despite all the "revolutions" of the 20th century we still live in a patriarchal society that often twists our understanding of the Bible's teaching on the role of men and women. As a result, Christian women tend to say yes more often – even to unreasonable demands – and to accept even abusive situations as God-given and unchangeable.

This is not what God tells you to do. **Matthew 18:15–17** is pretty clear about this.

> Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (**v.15**)

We are *not* to be silent about sin, even if we seem to be the only ones suffering under it. The Bibel tells us to confront the person who sins against us.

Why?

There are two reasons – one concerning the other person and one concering yourself. First of all, you may actually persuade the other person and make him turn away from his sin. And by this you will gain him back as friend. Secondly, you prevent yourself from becoming resentful. If you remain silent about a sin committed against you, you will harbour negative feelings – first against the other person, then about yourself. And if the sin repeats over and over again, you'll find out that you can't forgive anymore, because forgiveness without repentence is very difficult. Eventually, your negative feelings will begin to "eat you up" and affect your whole personality.

Proverbs 4:23 says that you have a responsibility to guard your own heart with all diligence. So *you* have to do something about the sin committed against you. And this begins by saying *no* to it.

What, however, should you do if this *no* is not respected? If we read on, we see that Jesus describes a clear path.

> But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

> And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (**v.16–17**)

Every step aims at reconciliation, if that is possible. But if he refuses to listen, you have to take more explicit measures. Jesus does not say "*if he does not listen, forget about it*". He says "*treat him as if he were an unbeliever*" and that means keeping a certain amount of distance from him. This does not only protect you from his sinful influence, but also gives him a chance to come back to his senses. In **1. Corinthians 5:3–5** Paul describes the purpose of separating from a sinful brother, namely that his spirit may be saved. If we tolerate sin, there is little chance that the sinner will change.

Strangely enough our churches are quick to pass judgment on people living in sexual sin while they tolerate almost all other kinds of sin. But Jesus does not make that distinction. If a brother does not want to let go of sin – and the emphasis is on does not *want* – we are to separate ourselves from him.

Compliance, however, makes people melt into the demands and needs of others. Compliant people can't stand distinct from people who want something from them. They minimize their differences with others to avoid confrontations and out of fear that others may not think well of them if they are different. Compliants are like chameleons. You can never rely on them to stand out for a long time. After a while, it becomes hard to distinguish them from the environment.

But compliance does not only keep us from *refusing evil* in our lives. After a while we become used to it and eventually even fail to *recognize evil*. Many people who live in dangerous or abusive relationships also live in constant denial. They find excuses for their spouse's behavior or even blame the situation on themselves. Their spiritual and emotional radar is broken; their ability to guard their heart is almost gone. And so is their ability to protect themselves by saying *no*. This happens for a number of reasons.

- Fear of hurting the other's feelings
- Fear of abandonment and separateness
- Fear of punishment or someone else's anger
- Fear of being selfish or unspiritual
- Feeling of guilt

The last reason is often experienced by people with an overstrict, critical conscience. They condemn themselves (and sometimes others) for things God himself doesn't condemn them for. Since their conscience is weak, it is defiled, as Paul expresses it in **1. Corinthians 8:7**. Afraid to confront their unbiblical and critical inner "parent", they become unable to confront others by saying *no* because this would cause more guilt.

Compliance needs to be distinguished from *biblical* compassion. In **Hosea 6:6** and **Matthew 9:13** God desires from us compassion, and not sacrifice. Compassion comes *from the inside*. We decide to give of ourselves to others. In contrast to that compliance is only *on the outside*. Compliants take on too many responsibilities and accept too many bad things – not by choice, but because they are afraid.

3.2 Avoidance

Boundaries, as we have discussed a while ago, shall not only keep the bad out but they shall also let the good in that our soul and spirit so desperately need. But some people have problems with that. Their boundaries are like walls, originally intended as protection, but now so strong that they let nothing in at all – neither the bad nor the good. No one can reach inside. No one can touch.

Avoidants are unable to accept the love and care that others want to give them. When they are in need, they withdraw so as not to let others see their needs. Although they deeply desire somebody else to step in and rescue them they are unable to ask for help. Their wall is just too strong.

Christians are particularly good in masquerading this type of behavior with religious terminology. They say (to themselves and others): "*My issues are nothing compared to what others deal with. It would be selfish to bother others with my little struggles. The Lord expects me to deal with them myself ... so let's not talk about them.*" Of course, the problems we're dealing with may seem insignificant when others have to face cancer and heart surgery or have lost their jobs. But nevertheless, we do need the help and love of others even if we appear strong on the outside.

God designed our personal boundaries to have gates, so that we can enjoy safe and close relationships with Him as well as with other people. But as it is our responsibility to shut these gates in the presence of evil, it is our responsibility to open them in times of need. **Revelation 3:20** says

> Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

God doesn't overrun our boundaries. He expects us to open up. Yet, for avoidants, opening to God and other people is almost impossible. They have developed a certain rigidity toward their God-given needs. Some view their problems and legitimate needs as something bad, selfish, or shameful.

Men in particular often completely ignore their emotional needs, because they want to maintain their self-image as strong and independent person. They claim to have all they need even if they feel a certain emptiness inside. After a while they get used to that and they don't even recognize anymore that they are in desperate need of help. The wall has become too strong to let anything in or out.

Our western society contributes a lot to this behavior. We can talk about everything except for what is going on inside *us*. We don't want to be seen as weak. And when others ask us "*How are you?*" we do not dare to give an honest answer because we don't expect them to listen anyway – so we simply say "*fine*" even if our heart is

ready to break. And, unfortunately, the other's respect for our privacy has become so great that they do not ask further questions even if it is quite obvious to them that our "*fine*" is far away from the truth.
Sometimes I wish, we wouldn't let each other get away with that.

Some people can be compliants and avoidants at the same time. They suffer from what could be called *reverse boundaries*. They have boundaries where they shouldn't have them and lack boundaries where they need them. They cannot say no to the demands of others but are unable to receive the support they so readily offer to others. They are stuck in a cycle of feeling drained, because they give themselves up for others. As a consequence they constantly lose energy and have nothing to replace it.

3.3 Other-Control

Setting appropriate boundaries is not easy. But it would be much easier if other people would respect them. But for some people our *no* is simply a challenge to change our mind. We all know them as salesmen and telemarketers, for whom a *no* means *maybe* and *maybe* means *yes*. While this may be productive in learning to sell a product, it can wreak havoc on a relationship.
Controllers have problems hearing and respecting other people's boundaries. They constantly violate these boundaries and are often viewed as bullies, manipulative and aggressive. The primary problem here is that these people resist taking responsibility for their own lives and try to give it to others instead. They use various means of control to make others carry the load intended by God to be their's alone by making it appear as a burden that needs to be shouldered by others as well. And because there are so many compliants in this world they always find somebody to pitch in for their irresponsibility.
Controllers come in two types: aggressive and manipulative controllers

1. *Aggressive controllers* clearly do not listen to other people's boundaries. They simply ignore them and run over them like a tank. Most of the time they are not even aware that other do have boundaries. In their world there is just *no place for someone else's no*. Once they have set their minds on a way how life should be, they try to make the world fit into their ideas – as if there would be only one, the "correct" way to live. In this, they neglect their own responsibility to accept others as they are.

   These people have their good sides. They often accomplish what others wouldn't even dare to try. Sometimes you see them do astonishing things – just because they don't worry so much about what others think. But you also see them as religious fanatics or bosses who appear like slave drivers to their employees.

   One good example is Peter. He was the one who dared to stand up and say what he believed. He was the first to confess Jesus as the Christ, he was the one who dared to address the crowd at Pentecost – untrained as he was. But he also had a lot of problems accepting boundaries. Remember **John 13:6–10**, where Peter refurse the Lord to wash his feet, or **Mark 8:31–33**, when Jesus talked about his upcoming death and resurrection. Peter actually rebuked the Lord for that, because he didn't want to accept what Jesus had said.

> And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

Of course, the Lord did not give in to what Peter had said. But he had to confront Peter's violation of his boundaries quite strongly.

Aggressive controllers have character traits that we sometimes can only admire. But they also have a big problem. They need to learn that their way is not the only way and that others have a right to have different opinions – even if they are wrong. They must learn to accept what others are saying. If they want others to change, they have to convince them instead of running over them.

2. *Manipulative controllers* are less honest than the aggressive ones. They do very well recognize the boundaries of others but try to persuade them to give up their boundaries. They talk you into a yes, seduce other into carrying their burdens, manipulate circumstances to get their way, or use guilt messages.

   A good example is Jacob who manipulated his brother into giving up his birthright (**Genesis 25:29–34**) and deceived his father into giving him the blessing that originally was reserved for Esau (**Genesis 27:1–29**). Over and over he used his cleverness to circumvent other's boundaries – the name Jacob, the "*deceiver*" was well chosen for him. Jacob had to change before God could use him. That's why God wrestled with him in human from (**Genesis 32:24–32**) before he changed his name into *Israel*. With that day, Jacob's character changed as well and he became more honest about what he wanted.

   Manipulative controllers deny their desire to control others. They say "I have done nothing wrong" and disown their self-centeredness. Only when they are confronted with their dishonesty, they can eventually take responsibility for it, repent of it, and learn to accept their and other's limits.

Controllers are usually *undisciplined* people. They have little ability to curb their impulses. Delaying gratification – whatever that may mean to them – is difficult for them and they are limited in their ability to take responsibility for their own lives. They expect others to do that and give them the gratification they desire. That is why they hate the word *no* from others.

Controllers are also isolated. That doesn't mean that they don't have many people around them. But they can never be sure whether these people stay with them out of fear, guilt, or dependency or whether they truly love them. They are afraid of being abandoned if they let go of they control or manipulation. And deep down inside they do not feel loved at all but very lonely. If they want to experience true love, they need to confront their fear and give up their control because there is no fear in love; but perfect love drives out fear (**1. John 4:18**).

Believe it or not, compliants and avoidants can also be controllers at the same time. However, because they can't say clearly where their boundaries are and what they want they tend to be more manipulative than aggressive. When they need emotional support from somebody else, for instance, they may do him a favor – expecting to receive love in return when they act lovingly. But that doesn't always work, especially if the other one can't read minds.

What is wrong here? Love is not self-seeking (**1. Corinthians 13:5**), so you should not give love only to receive love. If you try this, you are actually seeking indirect control over the other. You expect to get back what you invest instead of letting the other choose freely when and how to show his love to you. This may work occasionally, but most people feel betrayed, when they find out that your love has a price attached to it, and distance themselves from you because you are not truthful.

3.4 Unresponsiveness

Some people walk through the world seemingly indifferent about the needs of the people around them. They think that life is tough and that everybody needs to handle it by him- or herself. To the outside world, they often appear strong because they do not get distracted by the many things around them and usually accomplish what they have in mind. Many successful business people fall into this category, because in the business world you can seldomly afford to look left or right if you want to follow your grand vision.

But in relationships this lack of sensitivity makes people appear cold. They don't react to the needs of others – they don't even seem to hear them at all. And if others express their neediness to them, they shrug it off as if this need were only a tiny nuisance with which they shouldn't be bothered. For them, these needs are a distraction – nothing more – and they clearly do not want to deal with them.

Nonresponsives rightfully point out that they are not responsible *for* the life of others but fail to see that the do have a responsibility to connect to the people around them and to help them carry the heavy burdens that they cannot shoulder themselves. They do just the opposite of what God asks us to do in **Proverbs 3:27** and **Romans 12:18**

> Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.
>
> If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Both verses indicate the same idea: we *are* responsible to care about and help others whom God places in our lives – but only within certain limits. To refuse help when we do have the appropriate resources is equally wrong as feeling responsible for everything that happens around us.
There are two possible reasons for unresponsiveness. One is a *critical spirit* toward other's needs, which usually comes out of a projection of our hatred of our own incompleteness – a problem addressed by Jesus in **Matthew 7:1–5**. The other is being so much *absorbed by our own desires* that there is simply no space for the needs of others, which goes against what the Bible tells us in **Philippians 2:4**:

> Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Yes, we *are* to take care of ourselves. But this has a purpose, namely to enable us to help others without moving into a crisis ourselves.

Unresponsiveness is particularly problematic when combined with other-control. People who have a strong tendency towards both have a hard time looking past themselves. They expect others to shoulder their own burdens and to take care of them as well. And sadly enough, they often find a victim who is willing to put with this.
What happens if a controlling insensitive person meets a rescuing, sensitive enabler? Although they are like fire and ice, they will probably develop a relationship and may actually get married – because each of them fills the gaps of the other. The compliant avoidant needs somebody to take care of. That keeps her saying yes and out of touch with her own needs. And who is the ideal partner to take care of, if not the controlling nonresponsive? On the other hand, the controlling nonresponsive needs someone to keep him away from his own responsibility – and who fits that role better than the compliant avoidant. Unfortunately, this relationship benefits neither of the two, because their true needs remain unfulfilled all the time.

3.5 Functional and Relational Boundaries

The above boundary problems had to do with the personalities of the people who tend to lack proper boundaries or to set unreasonable ones. A final problem comes from an inability to separate functional boundaries from relational ones.
Functional boundaries are to be set for a particular purpose. They refer to our ability to complete a task, purpose, or job and have to do with discipline, initiative, and planning. In contrast to that, *relational boundaries* need to be set for making a relationship grow. They refer to our ability to be truthful to others with whom we are in a relationship.
A good example of that distinction can be found in **Luke 10:38–42**, which describes how Mary and Martha relate to Jesus. When Martha complained about Mary not helping her, Jesus pointed out that Mary had chosen the better. That doesn't mean

that what Martha did was bad. It just means that it was of *lesser value at this time* – and thus the wrong choice.

Many people have good functional boundaries but poor relational ones. They are great when it comes to performing tasks, but have difficulty telling a friend or a spouse that they don't appreciate his behavior. The reverse can also be true. Some people can be absolutely honest with others but have severe difficulties with being responsible at work or getting up in time.

3.6 How did we become that way?

Many of the boundary problems we experience in ourselves have to do with the way we grew up. We experience boundary violations, lack of boundaries in our parents, or that inappropriate boundaries were set against us. And we may either imitate this pattern or take overly strict measures to protect ourselves from getting hurt. Generally, the earlier and more severe the injury, the deeper the boundary problem. Let us look at a few examples.

1. *Withdrawal from boundaries.*

   It is crucial that developing children have the right to disagree and experience that *their* boundaries will be honored as well. If their personality shall develop, they must be able to experiment – and that includes the freedom to refuse and confront. **Proverb 27:17** says

   > Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

   Of course, they need to know that certain behavioral lines should not be crossed, and they should be disciplined for "misbehavior". But never ever should parents *withdraw their love* when their children disagree with them – either in word or deed.

   As God loves the sinner, but hates the sin, so should we treat our children. Otherwise they grow up believing that they are *not lovable when they don't behave*. They translate that into "*When I am good, I am loved. When I disagree, I will be cut off*". And as a consequence, they develop their compliant, loving, and sensitive parts and begin to fear or hate their truth-telling and separate parts.

2. *Hostility against boundaries.*

   A second boundary injury, easier to spot than the first one, is a parent's hostility against boundaries. Some parents become quite angry when their child disagrees with them and use angry words, physical punishment, or inappropriate consequences to express this anger. They send messages to their children like

   - *If you disagree with me, I will ...*
   - *You'll do it my way or else ...*
   - *You need an attitude adjustment ...*
   - *Don't you ever question me ...*

Of course, children need to be under the authority and control of their parents and need to be disciplined. But your approach should be "you have a choice" and not "my way or else". Although at a first glance these approaches aim at the same – namely consequences for irresponsibility, they are worlds apart. Discipline teaches them self-control – as expressed in **Hebrews 12:10–11**.

But punishment for growing independence only teaches them to search for ways how to avoid your wrath. They will learn how to hide their opinions under a compliant smile. And as adults they will very likely have problems in both saying and hearing *no*. Some will try to avoid confrontation at any cost. Others will follow the example of their parents and become controlling people who always want to have things done their way.

3. *Overcontrol.*

   Some parents try to protect their children from making any mistakes by setting overly strict rules and limits. They may prevent their kids from playing with other kids to protect them from learning bad habits. They may keep them out of school to protect them from "worldly influence". They create a sterile, bacteria-free environment to prevent them from getting infected.

   The problem with overcontrol is that it does not prepare the children for the real world. Just as the strict laws of the Pharisees in Jesus' time could not prevent the Jews from falling into sin, so can't too strict rules and limits prevent your children from making mistakes or getting hurt.

   Why?

   If you control every aspect of your children's life, you don't leave any room for them to make mistakes while they are with you. **Hebrews 5:14** says that it needs constant exercise to learn maturity and to discern good and evil. If they don't get exposed to what is in the world, they can't learn to choose the good in the presence of evil. If they grow up in a germ-free environment, they get sick the first time they travel into another region. It is no wonder that Americans catch all kinds of diseases on foreign travel while other nationals seem not to become affected at all.

   Overcontrolled children become dependent on a particular environment. They will experience problems with taking risks and being creative, and thus have difficulties setting and keeping firm boundaries.

4. *Lack of limits.*

   The opposite of overcontrol and hostility, a lack of appropriate limits, has an equally devastating effect. Parents who confuse a loving relationship with their children with an absence of discipline, raise children with no sense of self-discipline or responsibility. Why should you develop responsibility if your parents always cover for you and tolerate everything you do as an "innocent child"?

Discipline *is* necessary to help children develop character. A lack of discipline, coupled with a lack of connection, can produce an aggressive controller. Probably all of us have witnessed scenes in a supermarket where a 4-year old is in total control of a mother. The mother pleads and begs the child to stop having its tantrum and finally gives in to its demands – instead of disciplining it.

Now imagine the same scene with the child being replaced by a 40-year old adult. You won't be able to set limits on him or her now. And it is hard to get his or her attention for your needs. A lack of limits can create both controllers and unresponsiveness.

5. *Inconsistent limits.*

   Some parents have no proper vision about rearing children and therefore combine strict and lax limits. This totally confuses their children, because the messages they get are conflicting. The children cannot see any pattern in what their parents teach them, and do not know what the rules of family and life are. Saying no might bring respect, or it might bring rage – they never know. As a result they become quite uncertain about what they are and are not responsible for. They are like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind, as **James 1:6** puts it.

   The same effect may happen when parents don't really agree on the limits they set on their children. In that case children learn that it is o.k. to circumvent the limits set by one parent by going to the other. Girls may try wrap their father around their finger or bond together with the mother against the males in the family. Boys may get more attention from their mother, if she believes that they are treated harsher by the father than the girls, or from a father who is simply proud in his son. In any of these cases the message being received is that limits can be bypassed if you only find a weak spot. And the result is often a manipulative adult who searches for the person whose limits are weak enough to give in to her or his desires.

6. *Hypocrisy.*

   Parents, who are only half-comitted Christians, often do not live for themselves what they teach to their children. They tell them that it is wrong to lie, but find it o.k. to cheat on their taxes. They expect total obedience and "to honor their father and mother" but show little respect to their own parents. They send them to church and don't go themselves. They put all kinds of rules on them but always find excuses for not keeping to traffic rules or other laws of our society.

   In **Matthew 23:27–28, 25, 14, 13** Jesus to a strong stand against any kind of hypocrisy:

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.
>
> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.
>
> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer:
>
> But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

They try to appear good on the outside, but their children will easily see what is behind that mask. For them it seems that adults have a right to live such a double-minded life and that it is more important what people might think of you than who and what you really are. And the result is what Jesus describes in **verse 15**:

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

They become even worse than their parents. They see that boundaries are kept on the outside, but that you may break through them as it pleases you.

The above boundary injuries have much to do with our relationship to our parents and how we react to the way they raised us. There are, however, also other types of injuries

1. *Traumata.*

   Traumatic events, particularly during early childhood, have a strong influence on the development of our soul. A trauma is an intense emotional experience, usually a painful one such as: emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; accidents or debilitating illnesses; the death of a parent, a divorce, or extreme poverty. These events shake two necessary foundations of a child's growth, namely that

   (a) The world is reasonably safe.
   (b) They have a certain amount of control over their lives.

   Children who feel that these foundations are shaky, feel insecure and are afraid that they have no say in any danger that approaches them. As adults, these people need the help and love of others, because they can't heal themselves. That is what Christian fellowship is made for. We need to show them that they are now in an environment where it is safe to let their guards down to receive the love they desperately need.

2. *Our own character traits.*

   Some boundary problems certainly have to do with our character. If we are more active and willing to confront others, we run danger of becoming controllers. If we are rather quiet and reflective, we may shy away from boundaries or become avoidants. We need to develop a certain awareness for the tendencies we have.

3. *Our own sinfulness.*

   The final reason for boundary problems is, of course, our own sinfulness. We were born imperfect and depraved. It is our very nature to resist humility and obedience to God, to refuse accepting our position, and to desire to be “in charge” – not needing anyone and not accountable to anyone. Some part of that nature lives on in us even after we’re saved, and that prevents us from always being as responsible as we should be.

We can’t change the past anymore. It is useless to blame our parents for what they did wrong in us or to blame God for traumatic events that we had to go through. But we have the ability to change our reaction to past boundary injuries – if we become more aware of it.