

Righteous Boundaries

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Preacher: William HC

[0:00] Thank you for reading that, Cheryl. Yeah, interesting verses. We need a lot of help, don't we? But thank God that all of Scripture is God-breathed life.

We thank you that laws came through Moses. And we thank you that grace has come through Jesus. And so let us read, help us, Lord, to read these chapters of Deuteronomy in light of Christ, who he is and what he's done for us.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so if it wasn't enough to hear about capturing women and children as plunder last week, what else did we hear?

Anyone remember some of the stuff that happened in last week's chapters? Anything? Dealing with rebellious children. Wow, okay. Here's some really difficult texts.

So we come to God's word knowing that this is cross-cultural communication. This is us crossing into a world that is not like ours and yet has much to teach us even today in 2026.

[1:25] And maybe you're new to English service. Maybe you've heard these scriptures and maybe you're just wondering, why am I thinking about someone's private activity at home? Or maybe you've heard some of the punishments that are being meted out, right?

Where is forgiveness in all of this? What will we learn out of all these seemingly outdated instructions about marriage or about farming, about excluding people with disabilities and other nations, for example?

We're going to get to all that in just a moment. But again, let's remind each other, the same God who gave Moses and the Israelites these statutes and laws is the same God who has walked among his people through Jesus.

And he's the same God who lives in every believer's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. And so every time we read our Bibles, we actually time travel, in a sense, through God's timeless word.

2 Timothy 3.16, I was chatting about this with the baptism class actually last night. This is a wonderful reminder, 2 Timothy 3.16. All scripture is God-breathed and useful for us.

[2:34] And yet, especially in these two chapters, we do need God's help to bridge between what's true for this next generation of Israel. They're about to cross into the promised land of Canaan, remember?

And the issues they're about to face, and we need to bridge those issues with what's still true for us, the next generation of PC and BC. And I mean, actually, we kind of face similar issues to the Israelites, don't we?

We're people who are about to enter into a new life, a new week, I guess. Maybe for some of you, you're entering into workplaces where society is very divided.

You're entering into relationships and friendships where marriages, relationships, they're all very messy. We enter into a world where adultery, sexual sin is celebrated, even promoted.

Actually, so many of society's boundaries have changed, have they not? And yet, God has not changed. And so even today, kind of the big idea is that righteous boundaries are at stake here.

[3:37] Righteous boundaries, they still matter deeply to our holy God, and they should matter to us as well as a church family. And so last week, we can put the slide up for last week's kind of summary.

Pastor Albert, he showed us from chapters 20 and 21, how we ought to value life. Life is precious. Treat it fairly. You remember last week, we were actually really just camping out on the sixth commandment, right?

You shall not murder. And what Moses does is what he's doing in these couple of chapters, he's working through the ten commandments and giving lots of scenarios where the Israelites were to live out each of the ten commandments.

And so last week, we heard Israel was meant to be a community set apart from the nations. People who dealt with murder, people's lives being lost fairly. They were to wage war in a fair way. All of this is because every image bearer of God is precious. So you shall not murder, rather you should treat life fairly because it's precious. And actually, chapter 21 in your Bibles, if you see it, it ends with very culturally specific scenarios, right?

[4:46] It talks about cities of refuge, women captured in war, sons born to different wives, and so on. But the whole point behind it, the main principle is what we take into 2026.

God wants us to value all of life. Just like he asked Israel's second generation to value all of life. And how we apply that today, whether it's just treating people fairly at work, whether it's how we treat others who have disabilities, all of this is an outworking of the sixth commandment, you shall not murder.

Our gracious God has rescued all of us from slavery, undeserving people. He promises blessing and a rich life as his people trust him and keep his commands.

And so the next couple of minutes, we're going to camp on this section of Moses' commands, in chapter 22 and 23. There's lots going on here. We won't have time to go through each one of them, but I personally believe that they all come under the topic of keeping right boundaries throughout all of life.

So we're going to think about right boundaries in nature, from chapter 22, 1 to 12. And then we'll talk a bit about right boundaries in sex and marriage. And then we'll talk about right boundaries in just the rest of ordinary life, with the time that we have.

[6:05] I mean, think about a game of tennis. Who plays tennis other than Patrick? All right. Okay. Well, think of your favorite ball sport, right? How fun would it be if there were no lines at all?

No boundary lines. Yeah, you wouldn't know how to play the game. It wouldn't be a fun game to play. Or think about when you're driving on the road. Life is dangerous if there were no boundary lines, right?

If you're driving and you just get into dangerous territory, you would cross the line. Likewise, let us see what right boundaries in nature, in marriage and in sex, and in the rest of our lives can help us live as God's holy people.

Okay, right boundaries in nature. We'll have a look. Verse 1 starts with all kinds of animal-related instructions. And we shouldn't be surprised, though. What's the first line of the Bible?

Anyone know? In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. Yeah. So, the earth is the Lord.

[7:03] It's everything in it. He made us male and female. He made plants and trees of different kinds. And so Moses, again, he is pulling into the language of creation. He's reminding God's people, as they enter the promised land of Canaan, they're to reflect God's order and beauty in creation as well.

So, hence, these couple of instructions. Verse 1, 3, and 4. Israel's asked not to ignore the stray animals in our neighborhood. Our kids are loving the fact that we've got some stray kittens coming to our house.

And look, we haven't ignored them. We're trying to look after them. There is a point where we have to call the cat police or whoever deals with them. But look, for now, we care for them. And when collecting food, Israel, they were to care for the next generation of birds, right?

Verse 6 to 7. That's why you're not meant to just take out the whole family in one go. Egg and bird. And actually, they even asked to do seemingly random things, like put up scaffolding around high roofs, not mix different seeds and animals and cloth together.

These are echoes of similar laws in the book of Leviticus. You see, the overall picture here is one of right boundaries in nature, to keep things separate that were not to be mixed.

[8:16] And we don't always fully understand why, but we can see the principle under it, even for us today. And I know that some of you have probably entertained this question.

Okay, does that mean we can't wear, you know, mixed fibers today? Is this polyester, you know, jacket out of order? How many eggs can we eat, William? Seriously, because I read this and I have questions.

Look, I don't think Moses is policing our diet and clothing today. I don't think that's his point. That's the job of the Holy Spirit, as he works in your heart, as he lives in us, and calls us to transform our lives for him today, in our culture, in our context.

And yet there are underlying principles, aren't there? Right? A care for God's creation, a desire to reflect the boundaries that we see in nature as well.

And because of this, verse 5 does stand out a little bit for us today, doesn't it? It talks here about a woman not wearing men's clothing, nor a man wearing women's clothing.

[9:19] Our family were hanging out at K Road yesterday, and so this is the kind of question that sometimes pops up. How do we deal with this as a people of God? The surprise for us is that Moses says to do this kind of thing is detestable.

I think what's going on here is this. On the one hand, given that these Israelites, they're about to enter a land of Canaan, what's going on in Canaan? Was it an empty place? No.

There's some people there, right? The Canaanites. What do they worship? Do they worship the living God? No. They have their own religions. Perhaps this kind of cross-dressing was an issue amongst the religion of the people there.

We don't know for sure. We see lots of hints about what's going on in these other cultures and religions. But I think there's a principle here, of course, that goes beyond what clothes we wear as well.

Here's a call for God's people to live life as men and women, the way that God made us. We're to disciple, to parent our children, boys as boys and girls as girls.

[10:26] And look, I get it. We're all surrounded, especially at high school, right? And even at uni. We're surrounded by messages that challenge these basic truths. And yet, God's word reminds us there's still an order and beauty in nature that God wants each of us to reflect.

And we are blessed when we honor right boundaries in nature and live by them. And I don't want to assume we all, you know, come on our Sunday best.

But maybe this is a sensitive issue for you. Maybe it's been that before. Maybe sometimes you get made fun of for not being like a man or not being like a woman, the way that society expects.

Maybe even someone you love is struggling with their gender identity. Maybe you've felt hurt or shame over the body that God gave you. Let this be a place of healing and comfort.

Let us be a people who offer grace, not judgment. Prayer, not just pointing a finger. We see these boundaries, right? Moses lays them out. They are right boundaries in nature.

[11:36] And yet we hear about these boundaries in a messy world. And our Lord Jesus, he loves you. He loves us. He restores us to a right relationship with the Father. He gives us life and hope.

And it doesn't matter what gender you are. In him, we are one in Christ. Whether you're male or female. Young or old. Rich or poor. So I want you to be encouraged by that.

But if this is so, then what do we make? Of these very gender specific and almost very graphic scenarios in the rest of chapter 22. Cheryl was kind enough to read half of it for us.

You can read the rest in your own time. And you have questions, specific ones. Do come and ask. They are very tricky verses. But surely we're not meant to chase down newlyweds on their honeymoon for their bedsheets.

What's going on here? Just as there are right boundaries in nature, Moses now draws our attention to right boundaries in sex and marriage. Now, I preached the same passage to the other congregations.

[12:40] But this is a topic that is particularly sensitive but relevant for all of us today, isn't it? As we interact with the next generation and the society around us.

And no Asian parent ever willingly said, let's talk about sex. But that's okay. We can let God's word do the talking. Right from the first chapters of Genesis.

Again, we go back to Genesis. Our foundational story. We hear of how God made us male and female, don't we? In his image. There's a beauty around the fact that in that very Garden of Eden, our first parents, they were called to enjoy a one flesh union.

That points to God's love. That brings the blessing of children, of closeness, of joy. And actually, there are 66 books in the Bible. And God left one of them, the Song of Solomon, that just celebrates the mystery and beauty of sexual love.

And so actually, the Bible doesn't say sex is gross. It says sex is a gift. God's gift to his people. You want to think about it like a fire in a fireplace.

[13:48] When the fire is in the right place, it brings warmth and delight to the whole room, right? Sex between one man and one woman in the lifelong commitment of marriage brings warmth and delight.

Joy and life. In marriage, sex is actually a special signpost to God's promise-keeping love to his people. In a mysterious way, it points to his faithfulness.

His, I'll never betray you sort of love to the people of God. And yet, as with all of other gods of God's good gifts, we live in a world where sex has been distorted.

It's been abused. In many cultures, including ours today, sex is worshipped. It's like a god, right?

We use attractive bodies to sell things. We take advantage of sexuality to make people do what we want them to do.

But sex outside of God's boundaries brings chaos and tears. It's like a fire that's escaped the fireplace and is burning down the house. And that's what our world's approach to sex and marriage leads to.

[14 : 54] Billions of people burned and broken. But God's word is clear. He gives good boundaries around sex and marriage. It points to how precious the one flesh relationship is.

And that's why, actually, the seventh commandment in the Old Testament, ten commandments, is you shall not commit adultery. Not in person, not in your imagination even. Why?

Because adultery, being unfaithful to your spouse, it spoils the picture of God's exclusive loyalty to his people. And again, this is hard. We live in a broken world where maybe we have been victims of betrayal from our significant other.

And Moses knows this, even for the people of Israel. And so all these kind of scenarios in the rest of chapter 22 is Moses having two concerns in mind.

As he tries to apply God's seventh commandment, don't commit adultery, to the second generation of Israel. And one of you can notice, actually, if you look for yourself, several times, even in these couple of verses, Moses repeats a key phrase.

[15 : 56] You shall purge the evil. You see that? After verse 21, verse 22, verse 24. This is actually a very familiar statement by now for the people of God listening to Moses in Deuteronomy.

Actually, chapter 13, 17, 19, 21, Israel was called to purge the evil in lots of other areas of life.

Punishing false prophets, okay?

Stepping away from idol worshipping. Even judging dishonest witnesses. Likewise, when it comes to the seventh commandment, God's people were to purge the evil from among them.

Take seriously any sexual activity that would bring the wickedness of the surrounding nations, as he was pointing out, the evil, right, into our midst. And actually, this might be harder to spot, but Moses' second concern through these scenarios is actually just as important.

He wants to protect the weaker party. And in the time of the Israelites, the weaker party was almost always the young, vulnerable woman. Right?

[17 : 02] We can see this a little bit if we dig more in detail in the first scenario that Cheryl read out earlier. Verse 13. Okay? Here's a story. Verse 13. Here's a husband who accuses his newly married wife of not being a virgin when they get married.

And then he hates her, my translation says. Starts to accuse her of being unfaithful from the get-go. Now, in ancient Israel, in some cultures around the world today, that kind of false accusation for a young woman is devastating.

Not just for her, but actually for her whole family because of this honor and shame idea. Oh, wow. What a shame. Okay? This family's reputation would have been in shreds.

And that's why it says, right, in verse 15 and so on, the father and mother get behind the woman, get behind their daughter, and try to prove that their daughter is innocent.

They're trying to defend their daughter's honor. And again, this all sits and makes sense because Deuteronomy 19.15 says, One witness, that husband, is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense.

[18 : 10] A matter must be established by several witnesses. Can you see this? This is our memory verse being played out in a very tricky situation. You look at verses 15 and 19.

It describes the outcome if the husband's caught lying. If he's caught lying, he's actually shamed his wife unfairly and her parents. So he actually must pay them a bride price, is what they did in those days, but pay it double the usual amount.

He's to be publicly punished. And here's the most surprising part, verse 19. What does it say? He must not divorce her as long as he lives. Okay? If you are a bloke who just tries to, you know, make a false accusation about your newly married wife and get away, that now you've got to make this marriage work.

Right? It forces the husband to actually, you know, give himself to her fully. It's awful when we get falsely accused. And here is a mechanism to protect, in this case, the vulnerable woman. But in our day and age, it could be the other way around as well. Look, on the other hand, though, in this context, verses 21 and 20 state that the wife was the one caught lying about her sexual history.

[19 : 25] Actually, it says the men of her city, where she grew up, is the one that is responsible for carrying out the punishment. It's the whole city where she grew up in, and where she seems like secretly slept around, is now charged with preventing ungodly behavior from being just a normal thing or an accepted thing in their midst.

We're going to talk a little bit about how soon, about how Jesus just radically changes how we deal with this kind of sin today. Okay? You will see no stones here. It's interesting that not once in the rest of the Old Testament do we read of Moses' instructions actually being carried out.

I don't know why. Maybe the principle, you know, these scenarios just were so graphic, so memorable, that people just never did it, had to deal with it. I'm not too sure. And yet the principle remains.

Right? Sex is God's gift for marriage. It is incredibly precious because it is a signpost of his faithfulness to us. And so let's protect it.

Let's keep it in the fireplace where it belongs. Pastor Barry will talk a bit more about divorce because it comes up again in chapter 24 and lots of other difficult situations.

[20 : 37] But in the rest of the chapter, there are other possible situations. Sometimes there's a man or a woman who willingly commits adultery and actually both are punished.

But then there are some times where a woman is actually, you know, forcibly engaged in a sexual encounter. She has no choice. Here, the woman is protected.

The man is the one who's punished. And there are times where things just look a little bit murky and gray. Again, the man is required to do all he can to provide for the woman that he's just hurt and harmed.

This is kind of just scenarios, case law in an antiquated sense. To help Israel think through, what would you do in these situations? All right?

We're meant to have judges that could follow justice and only justice. What does it look like for them? And look, you and I, we can listen in 2026 and go, wow, isn't God restrictive?

[21 : 35] Isn't he mean? Or we could think, God, maybe you are a heavenly father. And here you are saying to the daughters of Israel in that particular time, I care deeply for you.

I care for your body and your honor. I want to protect you from harm. Isn't that a good God? And actually, the New Testament carries on this principle of safeguarding even further.

Safeguarding women especially. I mean, the son of God, he was born to a virgin who was falsely accused. And her husband, Joseph, took steps to protect her honor.

Jesus himself protects the adulterous woman in John 8. I don't know if you know that story. She's dragged out, right? Probably the husband should have been dragged out too. But just she is the one that's dragged out.

About to be stoned. And Jesus says, I don't condemn you. And sisters, Jesus loves you. He cares for you. And you honor so much.

[22 : 41] In Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 to 30, Jesus says, he won't even allow other people to even undress you in their hearts.

That's not even okay. Back then and now, God's heart is to care for you. When it comes to this topic, all of us actually have to draw boundary lines somewhere, don't we?

And here in Deuteronomy 22, God gives boundary lines for sex and marriage. That sound hard for us today. And yet they're good and right for the people of Israel. And today, the boundary lines that God gives to us as followers of Jesus, they're good and right as well.

We can think of the author of Hebrews. He says, to keep the marriage bed undefiled. Why? For God would judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral. The Apostle Paul, he reminds us, our body, it's actually a temple of the living God.

That's where God's Holy Spirit lives. And if that's the case, wow, let us treat it carefully. Let us flee from sexual immorality. That's why Cheryl and I, we're really careful, actually, with our family's access to social media and just private messaging.

[23:54] It's why, actually, sometimes when couples come up to us and say, oh, we're dating, we try and encourage them to establish clear boundaries early. And it's why sometimes, even as a church family, we might have to take a stand sometimes.

Even practice church discipline. If there was a case of unrepentant sin in this area. Church, we need to purge the evil from our midst and not tolerate it.

But also to shepherd that brother or sister to repentance. And yet, for those of us who have betrayed the Lord in this area of our life, and I include myself among them, God offers you grace and forgiveness.

He does. The Bible says every sinner in any kind of sin, sexual or otherwise, can claim a new identity in Jesus Christ. Do you believe this good news?

Because 1 Corinthians 6.11 says, that's, you know, he lists, Paul lists a whole bunch of sexual sins even. And other kinds of sins. And then he says, that is what some of you were, past tense.

[24:58] But then you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Do you believe this, church? And if so, then we can ask ourselves with confidence, what are the sexual sins in my life that I need to repent of?

To confess before a holy God. And then we can rejoice. Good news. Jesus, he took our condemnation. He no longer condemns us.

And so let us go and sin no more. All right. Big topic. A couple more minutes. We're going to consider briefly the rest of Deuteronomy chapter 23.

Again, right boundaries. But now we're looking at all kinds of other areas in ordinary life. Now you might look at verse 21, verse 1, and go, well, that's not ordinary. Very unsettling.

Other than your doctor, you might even talk about some of these body parts. Moses, what's going on here is that he's continuing the theme of right boundaries. And here, in these verses, he begins in the first eight verses by laying down right boundaries when Israel gathered to worship.

[26:13] They were not to include men who were made unable to have children. Actually, in the land of Canaan at the time, this was often a practice done when you fully devoted yourself to serve a pagan god.

I don't know if you've been watching that movie, The Odyssey. There was a lot of gods in those times. And, you know, similar, you know, Israel were entering a country where people were worshipping lots of other gods.

And some of them went all out to worship them, even by mutilating their bodies. And not to include that kind of false worship. That's the context. That's the context.

Verse 2 to 3 might be also describing, you know, someone who's given themselves to a different faith. Maybe that's why they've done a forbidden marriage, in a sense. Or it could be actually referring to someone who's actually married a really close relative.

Even today, that's not okay. You're not allowed to do that. Moab and Ammon, in verses 3 to 6, here were two countries on Israel's eastern border. And these were people who harmed Israel in the past.

[27:18] Including through, actually, physical and spiritual adultery. And so, Moses is basically saying, look, all these people that could harm your worship, you need to keep them out. Why?

Why is this even necessary? Well, think about what happens if, let's say, we were to start a new ministry here, right? Let's say, you know, we're back to day one of starting PCBC English, as it were.

And as you're starting up, everyone in the team needs to be on the same page about what we believe, right? Surely. We need to share the same statement of faith. We need to agree with the vision and mission of the church together.

There's got to be some non-negotiables that all of us go, yep, okay, this is what we're about. We're here in Christ to build vibrant multilingual congregations to bless our local communities and beyond. Right? TM. If you were to include in this mix those who are not really committed to that right worship, maybe it's like, oh, not in Christ, but in Buddha or in Allah.

[28:17] Hang on. That's not okay. Or if you were trying to include people and maybe they join the church and they say, oh, I don't really feel like reaching out to and thinking about different languages.

No, no, no, that's fine. Or I want to do something else instead with our time that's outside what the church believes. We get into problems, don't we? And so there are right boundaries to maintain

between those who share your faith, your vision and mission, and those who are less committed. It's not being prejudiced. It's just saying this is who we are. This is who the assembly of God is here at PCVC. So I think that's why Moses gave different time limits as well to some of the other groups of people.

We didn't get to read this. You can read it yourself this afternoon. But look, if there were false worshippers, people who didn't even worship the living God, they're to be permanently excluded, right?

The Canaanites, not even to the 10th generation. Moabites and so on. Ammon, not even to the 10th generation. But here it says the third generation of Edomites and Egyptians, maybe they could become part of the Lord's assembly, right?

[29:23] Even at this point of salvation history, though, notice what's happening. God's not saying only Israelites are welcome. He's saying Israelites plus the nations.

And it moves more and more to that direction. At the proper time, the faith does wonderfully open up. We think of actually how Jesus in Luke's gospel talks to the Canaanite woman and says, I'm going to heal you.

I'm going to help you. We think of Philip. He's in the book of Acts. He's talking to this Ethiopian eunuch, someone who's unable to have children, right? And he says, welcome to the kingdom of God.

I can baptize you. To Jews and Gentiles, we now have faith in Jesus the Messiah together. That's good news, isn't it? So there are still right boundaries for that time.

We'll skip kind of 9 to 14. Again, basically the picture here is there's a specific kind of ritual cleanliness, boundaries to keep, especially when you're in times of battle.

[30:26] When you're encamped against your enemies, you're just to keep away from everything impure. And again, we kind of flinch when it talks about bodily discharges.

Here is God's word reminding us that in times of intense conflict, you still need to pursue holiness and purity. That's still a non-negotiable. And I am very glad we don't dig holes outside of church to go to the bathroom.

But actually, spin this around a bit. If our body is a temple of the living God because of the Holy Spirit, where is holy? It's not just this building, 209 Tirauko Drive.

Everywhere is holy where we are, right? Because God lives in us. And so actually, now, the stakes are much higher. Every moment of your life is holy to the Lord.

It's not just, you know, it's not just this is holy and this is just common. It's actually every part of our life. And actually, that's what we see in the rest of Deuteronomy chapter 23.

[31:29] It talks about, Moses talks about welcoming refugees. It talks about turning away from prostitution. It talks about actually even things like lending money to your relatives. I don't know if you've ever had to do that yet, but you might do one day when you start working.

But in all these situations, we can live holy to the Lord, can't we? Because actually, there should be no proper boundaries, right, when it comes to who needs our help.

Or we shouldn't just put up false boundaries when it comes to what are the areas in our life that needs to change before God. If our God is Lord of all, he has a right to be Lord over all parts of our lives.

He can be Lord over how much coffee we drink each week. He can be Lord over what we buy when we go online on Temu. He can be Lord over how much money to give when a family member asks for help.

Church, let's be a people of God who don't just set up boundary lines over what God needs to change in us. Because he loves us. He made each of you male and female in his image.

[32:42] And he has redeemed you through Jesus. He's made you a temple of the Holy Spirit. And so because of that, we can offer our whole lives to him completely.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Do help people especially to be able to sift through your good commands.

May things that are unclear become more clear in the light of your gospel, in the light of who Jesus is. And we thank you so much for how Moses wanted to keep your honor and spell out all the ways that his people could serve you.

And we want to be a people who do the same. So help us as PCBC English. Be a people holy to the Lord. Because we are not our own. We were bought with a price.

And so we glorify you. In Jesus' name. Amen.