

Exploring Boundaries

Some thoughts...

(I'm not an expert)

What are the purpose of Boundaries?

- To protect - to things people safe
- To control - to things people in (or out)
- To define - to mark claimed territory
- To guide - to show in and out of bounds

Some boundaries are only idealized, imaginary (invisible);
others have barriers that are physical and solid.

Who sets them, and how do we know which of them are right?

To Protect - by Isolation and Separation

We call this: "Gerbil TV"



To Protect - by Isolation and Separation

We are all part of the Sheep Fold



Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:3

To Control - using a gate or door

Cats must be removed from the bedroom at bedtime



To Control - using a gate or door

Closing the gate of Jerusalem to avoid temptation.

When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over.

I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day.

Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem.

But I warned them and said, “Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you.”

From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath.

Nehemiah 13:19-21

To Define - to mark claimed territory

No animal illustrations here



Remember: A state line is not necessarily coincident with a road

Boundaries are not always Clear and Meaningful

“Four Corners”?



How far off is the original “+”?

To Define - to mark claimed territory

There will be a distinct separation in the last day

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will **separate** the people one from another as a shepherd **separates** the **sheep** from the **goats**.

He will put the **sheep** on his **right** and the **goats** on his **left**.

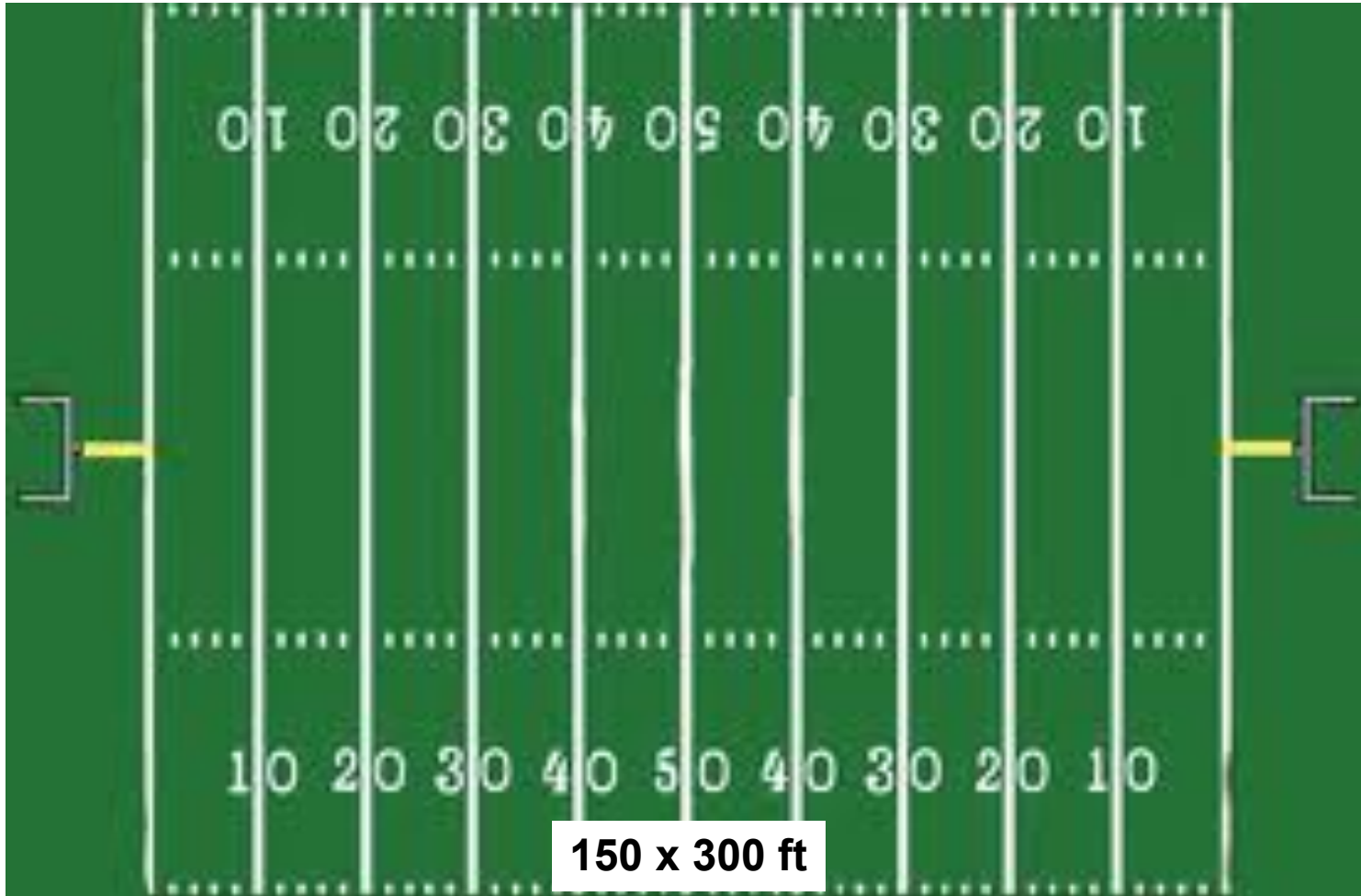
Then the King will say to those on his **right**, '**Come**, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...

Then he will say to those on his **left**, '**Depart** from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat...

Matthew 25:31ff

To Guide - to stay within bounds

A football field, for instance, has well defined boundaries



Ball games generally have:

a goal (a boundary that must be crossed to score),

and an out of bounds (boundaries which you must not pass).

To Guide - to stay within bounds

Playing football in the yard, defining the goals and out-of-bounds

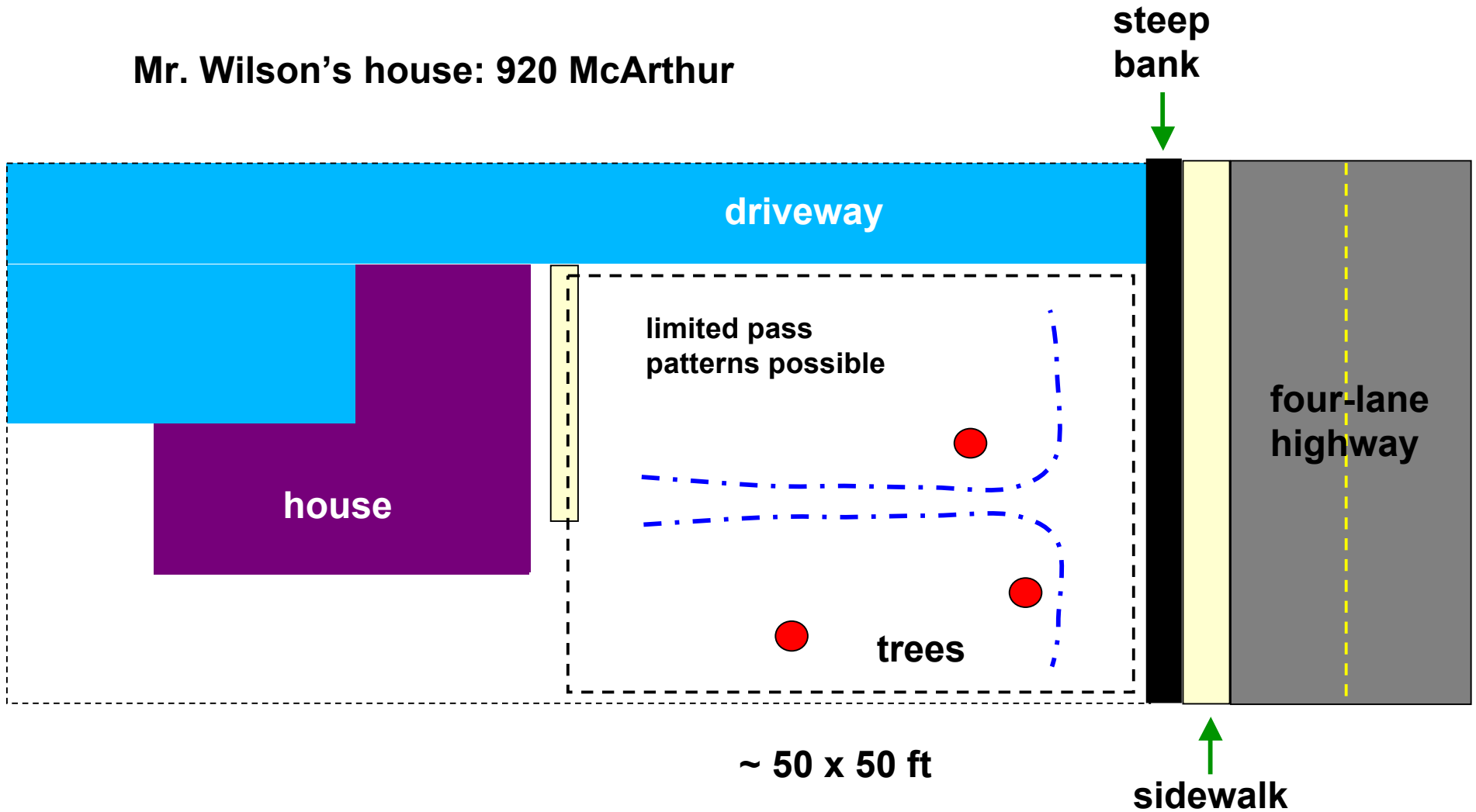
Mr. Wilson's house: 920 McArthur - this was the Main St. preacher's house



To Guide - to stay within bounds

Playing football in the yard, defining the goals and out-of-bounds

Mr. Wilson's house: 920 McArthur



Not quite the Super-Bowl...

To Guide - to stay within bounds

One definition of sin is from the word hamartia - “missing the mark”



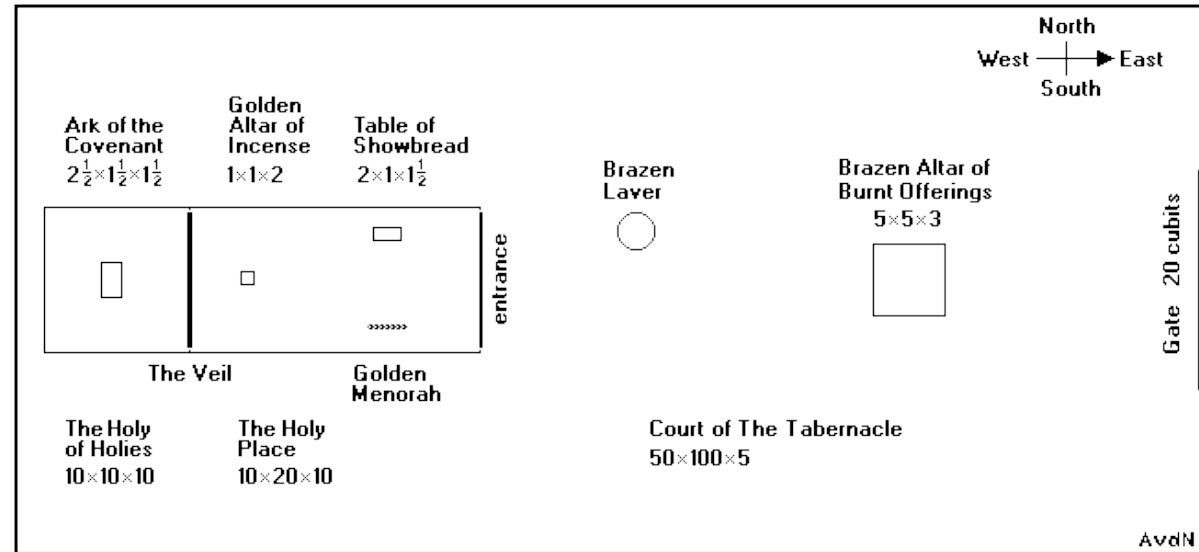
... in the NT, the word “hamartia” does not describe a single act of sin;
It describes a state of sin... **William Barclay**

Boundaries of God's Physical Kingdom (History)

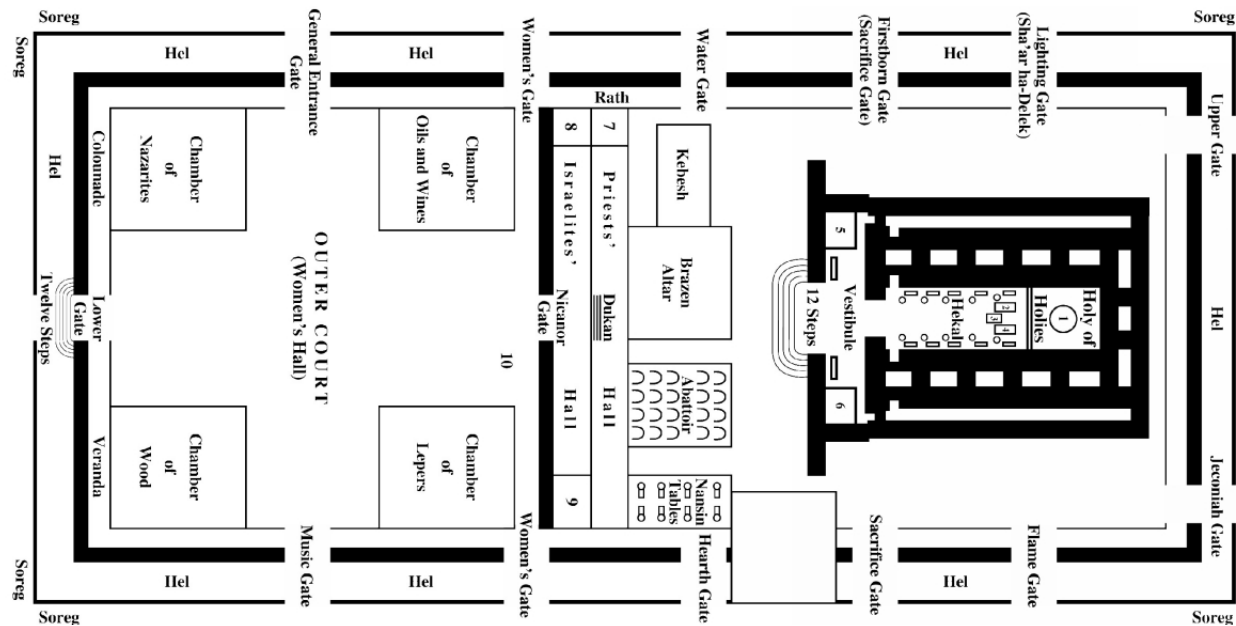
- **Eden** - no known boundaries until man sinned (the one rule was a “boundary”), then an angel with a flaming sword kept people out
- **Abraham in Canaan** - vague boundaries; “Hebrew” or “habiru” meant wanderer or nomad
- **In Egypt** - bounded by the country's boundaries (Joseph was a slave, then a prisoner, then a free ruler); his people eventually became slaves
- **Exodus** - freedom, but because of doubt they are bounded by desert, ocean, mountains, and other nations
- **Israel** - the Jordan was a natural boundary to entering the promised land, but not a boundary for the nation (description in Numbers 34 and later in Joshua 15); boundaries were imposed to shield from pagan influences
- **Split Kingdom** - 10 vs 2 tribes (or really 11 vs 1)
- **Conquered Nation** - Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Idumea; political and social boundaries (think of the parable of the Good Samaritan)

Boundaries of the Tabernacle and Temple

Tabernacle



Temple



Only certain people could enter certain zones.

The Wall between Jews and Greeks

**The nation of Israel split physically and spiritually;
there were people for and against God.**

**In Jesus' time there were national boundaries
(it was a conquered nation),
but the most critical boundary was a philosophical one:
Pharisees vs Sadducees**

**The Jews set up walls or barriers;
Peter was given the job of expanding them to include the Greeks.
(Acts 10)**

There are no subcategories inside the "walls".

**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile -
the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,
Romans 10:12**

**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there
male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Galatians 3:28**

We have to break down some barriers

**But now in Christ Jesus
you who once were far away
have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

**For he himself is our peace,
who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the **barrier**,
the **dividing wall of hostility**,
by setting aside in his flesh the law
with its commands and regulations.**

**His purpose was to create in himself
one new humanity out of the two,
thus making peace,
and in one body
to reconcile both of them to God through the cross,
by which he put to death their hostility.**

Ephesians 2:13-16

There are no restrictions to those who can enter the New Kingdom.

We have to build back some barriers

The Temple (prepared for by David and built by Solomon)

The Temple was destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Judah.

Cyrus allowed the repair of the temple:

The dimensions were much smaller than the original,

Those who remembered wept, because of the loss.

Later there was a rent (creating a new boundary) in the temple when Jesus died.

**God allowed the walls of man to be torn down;
all that is left is the western “Wailing wall”**

Repairing the Walls and Gates of Jerusalem was also a great work.

Nehemiah left his job as cupbearer to the king for this.

**The work was done in an amazingly short time
in spite of great opposition.**

Are we also repairers of the broken walls? [Isaiah 58:12]

**If so, we need to know where they truly should be
(and what they are for).**

God created Boundaries for us

There is nothing particularly wrong with boundaries, of course.

God himself fixed a boundary between light and darkness, and between the ocean and the land.

“I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross.” [Jeremiah 5:22]

F. LaGard Smith

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:36-40

God’s boundaries are based on Love.

**Perhaps more than “laws” or “rules” -
but the idea of keeping us in the fold.**

People Create other Boundaries as Well

We sometimes try to create walls
inside and outside of the Wall of God.

Are we walling ourselves (and others) “in” --- or “out”?

Do we ever paint ourselves into a corner?

The kinds of changes in the worship now being encountered that are more **insidious** are ... singing enhanced by ... performers holding microphones in the pews, ... dimming of the lights for emotional effect, handclapping as a show of approval, support, or excitement...

Many are going along with the facilitation of these “**insidious influences**.” For example, one congregation moved the Lord’s table to the back of the auditorium... Once such “**insidious influences**” become established or “take hold” the next step is more easily accepted...

a recent “Church of Christ” magazine issue

Boundary Stones must not be Moved

Do not move your neighbor's **boundary** stone
set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive
in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess.
Deuteronomy 19:14

We must be careful with the boundaries

The rules of the Mishnah are extensions of scriptural commands. The idea of the rabbis was to “make a fence for the Torah” – that is, to make a fence around the Scriptures – so that there would be no chance of ever getting close enough to commit a violation.

Although the Mishnah was not formally compiled until the end of the second century A.D., it was this very process of “fence-building” which time and again drew Jesus’ rebuke.

Instead of enforcing God’s boundaries for proper ritual and practice, the rabbis were enforcing their own boundaries.

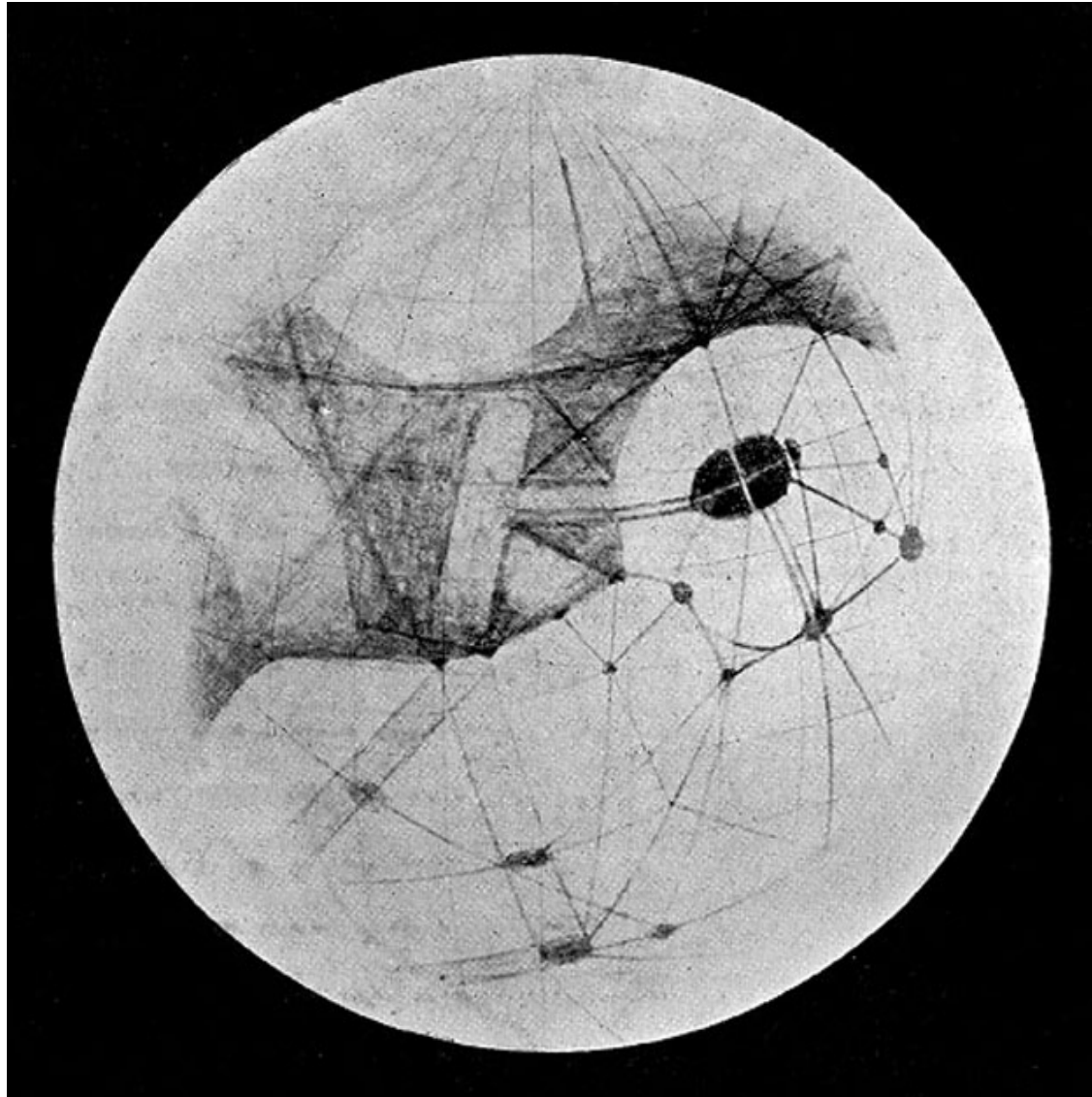
Good motives notwithstanding, they had moved the divine boundary stones and deprived the people of legitimate latitude which they should have been permitted to exercise.

The more I read the Gospels, the more I’m impressed with the number of fences Jesus came to tear down.

F. LaGard Smith

We must not create artificial boundaries

Percival Lowell, renowned astronomer, was convinced he saw canals in the surface of Mars (that he attributed to intelligent life).



Where should religious boundaries be defined?

**Think of an image of groups of contractors
looking at drawings of plans;
Where should we build?**

**Should we follow natural boundaries,
like a creek or a mountain ridge or cliff?**

**Or where a stream was thought to exist
(but in the larger view did not);**

**Do we build over perceived gaps or holes
to cover them so that no one can “fall in”?**

The Parable of Two Farmers

One farmer spent all of his time perfecting his fences.

**He worked on them so much
that he had no time for plowing, or planting,
and he had nothing to harvest.**

**One farmer had no fences,
and he had time to plow and plant,
but spent the rest of his time fighting rabbits and weeds.**

He had nothing to harvest, either.

There must be some type of balance between the two paths.

**We must pay attention to our fences -
so we can work the fields and thus enjoy the harvest.**

Over-pursuit (A Bridge too Far?)

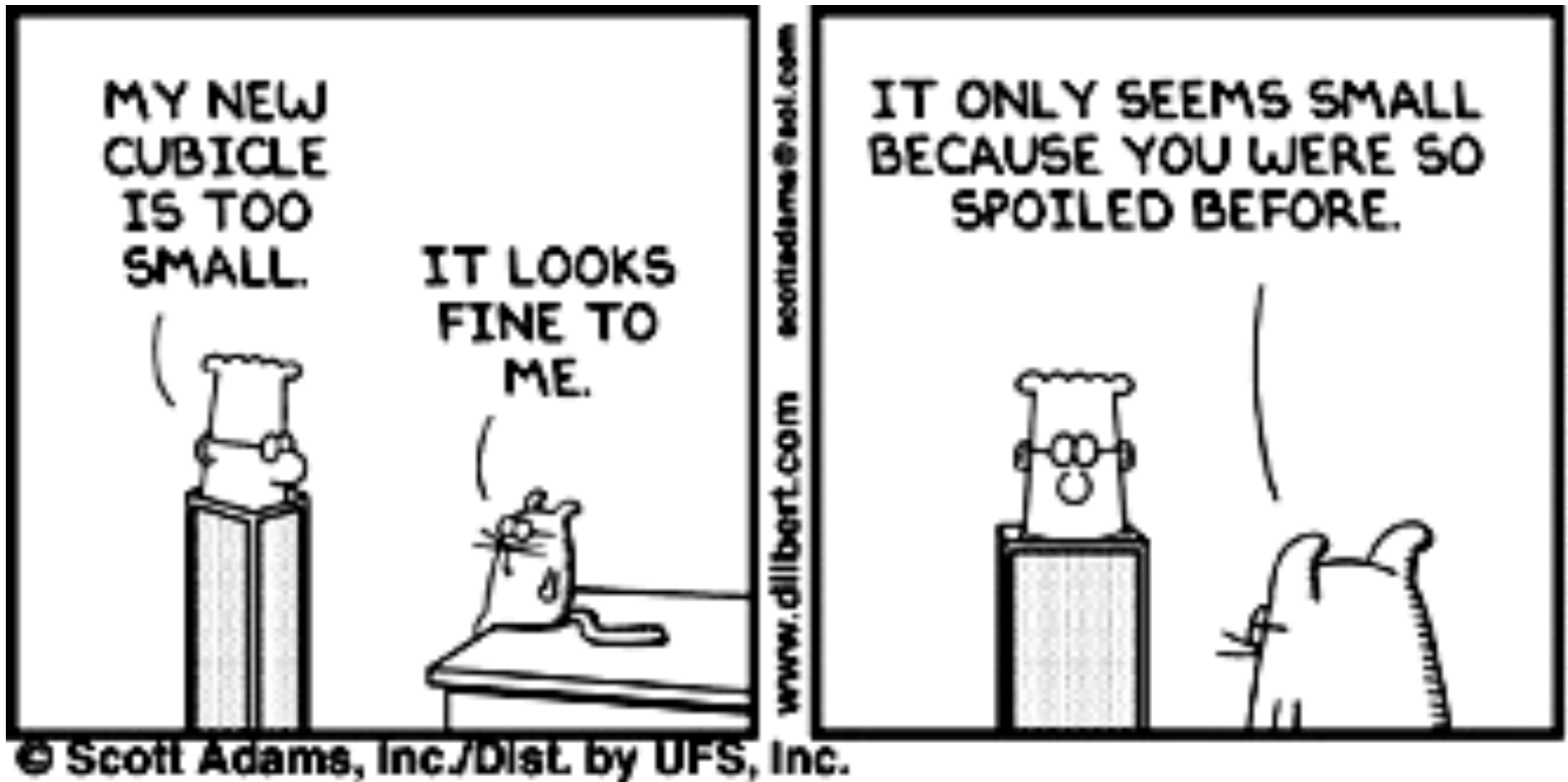
We may take too much interest in the “form” of boundaries.

**It is though we are too protective of the appearance -
don't chip the paint or gouge the surface (or leave a wet ring);
the surface is sacred;**

**Perhaps we decide to allow no images,
so the walls are covered with patterns -
(like the Jews and Moslems)**

We must not allow ourselves to worship the walls!

Do we feel Squeezed by the Boundaries?



Perhaps it is because they are artificial, or man-made.

Do we feel Squeezed by the Boundaries?

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees,
you hypocrites!

You give a tenth of your spices -
mint, dill and cumin.

But you have neglected
the **more important** matters of the law -
justice, mercy and faithfulness.

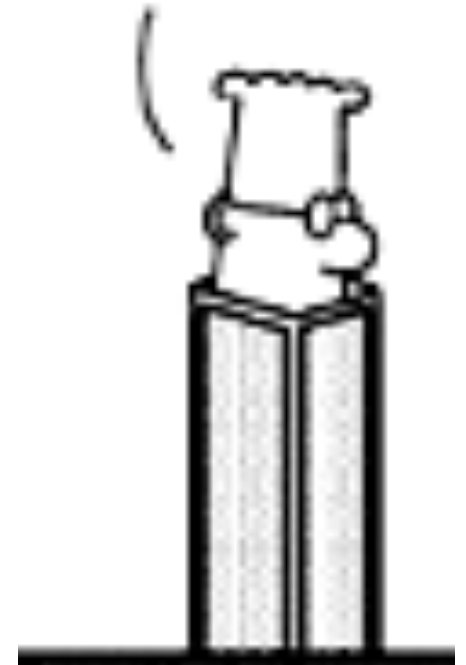
You should have practiced the latter,
without neglecting the former.

You blind guides!

You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Matthew 23:23-4

MY NEW
CUBICLE
IS TOO
SMALL



The unimportant things squeeze us,
but the critical things set us free!

What are the boundaries that are important to us?

We may feel the need for Boundaries



Boundaries may be Established to Teach

God established a boundary at the mountain where Moses met with God and obtained the law (Exodus 19). To disobey meant death.

The people were taught in that time to obey a rule without question because they did not understand.

Later they learn and don't need the "you shall not", because they understand the fundamental principles of what is right and wrong, Good and Evil.

For children we "establish boundaries" to modify behavior; we create **temporary** boundaries (like an expandable gate for the stairs) while they learn to walk; this is not just to control them, but to help in the learning process.

Some Flexibility May be Needed

Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins.

If they do, the skins will burst;

the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

**No, they pour new wine into new wineskins,
and both are preserved.”**

Matthew 9:17

Flexibility in the boundaries allows for growth

(this is not the same as no boundaries at all);

but they must not be stretched to the breaking point.

Are the boundaries always hard or soft?

God is the ultimate judge.

Restoring the New Testament “_____”

Some feel like there is absolutely no flexibility – they simply take the harshest course. The search for New Testament Christianity sometimes ends up only in New Testament Phariseeism.

The west used to be completely free range, but ranchers came in and put up razor wire to establish boundaries. Do we need such drastic measures (are we putting up our own type of razor wire)?



We must watch out for false teachers, but make sure we do not become them.

**They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.**

Mark 7:7

We must be Cautious with our Interpretations

Accept the one whose faith is weak,
without quarreling over disputable matters.

[Paul's example is about food]

One person considers one day more sacred than another;
another considers every day alike.

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.

Instead, make up your mind not to put

any **stumbling block or obstacle** [boundary]

in the way of a brother or sister.

Let us therefore make every effort to do
what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 14:1, 5, 13, 19

The Final Word...

almost

God's boundaries protect, control, define, and guide us.

One thing (out of many)

that is so great about Forest Mill:

**there is a broad acceptance of some variations in belief
(but not too far off...)**

We must be careful when interpreting the boundaries.

We must balance our need for boundaries

between the “too tight” and “too loose” extremes.

We must not let our boundaries offend or misguide others.

**We must keep studying to better understand the boundaries
and their meaning.**

Don't worship the walls – Worship God!

The Final Frontier

The ultimate boundary at the last day:
The separation between Physical & Spiritual

In Hades, where he [the rich man] was in torment...

So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham replied, '... between us and you a great **chasm** has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

Luke 16:19-31

... **as far as the east is from the west,**
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalms 103:12

... whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has **crossed over** from death to life.

John 5:24