DRAWING THE LINE

Have you ever thought about lines? We were probably first introduced to lines when we started doing puzzles in school and Sunday School, when we connected the dots, with lines to create an animal or some shape using alphabet or numbers to go from one dot to the next. Probably my most distressing lines were ones used in diagramming sentences; grammar was not one of my strong points.

Thinking about lines I came up with quite a list of different kinds of lines and uses for lines. We all use lines, telephone lines, clotheslines, the lines in a parking lot help a lot; we all know what kind of a mess a parking lot becomes in the wintertime when the lines are covered with snow and ice. We start at a young age lining up to leave the classroom, in the lunch line and taking our turn at being line leader.

As adults we end up in lines quite often too, at the bank, in the super market check-out, lines to get tickets for movies, sporting and concert events. With the Lord’s help hopefully we will never end up in a soup kitchen line.

Lines on paper were a major breakthrough, if you are like me to write a letter on paper without lines, it is usually an up or downhill problem.

A sports playing field depend on lines to keep the game in a playing boundary, going out of bounds, stops the game and in most games gives the playing object to the opposing team. There is very little space between a fair and foul ball. The spectators sit on the sidelines.

Sometimes lines are used in political campaigns, like 54-40 or fight, which brings up the longitude and latitude lines. County line, state borders, borderlines of countries, the Mason-Dixon Line was the line between the North and South during the slavery years and Civil War.

Clothing has lines too; the a-line of the 70’s and of course the hem line has moved higher and lower to suite the whims of the clothing designers. Pin strips are the lines on baseball uniforms, designed first for Babe Ruth, a portly man using the vertical lines to create an optical illusion of height and slenderness.

Sidewalks and wood floors have lines too. Geometry takes lines and creates angles and shapes, parallel lines run on forever, never meeting. We all have lines drawn around us, such as the boundary lines; our property that God has so graciously allows us to use for the short time we are here on this earth has boundary lines.

There have been lines drawn since the beginning of time; God drew a line for Adam and Eve in the Garden. They could not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but we all know what happened to that line, it was crossed. An interesting thing about the nature of man, if you create a law, draw and line, the challenge immediately is to step over that line, break that law. We’ve seen it in our society with prohibition, as soon as it was illegal to have booze, everyone was trying to make it, smuggle it and sell it. An amusing antidote in OUR DAILY BREAD on October 21st, 2003 reads, In Galveston, Texas, a hotel on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico put up this notice in each room: NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY. Yet every day, hotel guest threw their lines in to the waters below. Then the management decided to take down the signs – the fishing stopped. If Adam and Eve would have never been told they could not eat of the tree, but it just sat there inconspicuous, they may have never ate from it, but the instant they were told not to and tempted to do it, the tree was just too attractive to ignore.

Eve crossed the line and then gave the fruit to Adam and he also ate, and they both blamed it on to someone else. In Genesis 3:12 and 13 - “The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the women, “What is this you have done?” the woman said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” We have Adam blaming Eve and Eve blaming the serpent. How many times have we crossed the line and been caught, only to blame someone else for our sins.

In I Samuel 17 – Goliath drew the line, the scene here is that the Israelites were on one hill and the Philistines were on another hill with a valley between them and the battle line was drawn between the two camps. Goliath was a nine foot giant, the champion Philistine warrior and as we read in 1 Samuel 17:16, Goliath had shouted both morning and evening for forty days to the Israelites to have someone sent out to challenge him.

Then David comes on the scene, his father sent him to bring food to his brothers. He arrives in the army camp as the warriors are taking up their positions on the battle lines and Goliath steps out and shouts his battle cry. David hears the war cry; he does not run as others have instead in I Samuel 17:26 – David asks the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” then David said to King Saul in verse 32 – “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” The line is about to be changed, David was stepping out in the name of the living God. David was stepping out in faith, the faith that his fellow Israelites could not muster up. Now Goliath fell over the line that he had drawn because he had been challenged in the name of the living God and lost. If we continue to read in I Samuel we would see that David continued to win battles in the name of God. David was only a lad but faith in God comes in all kinds of sizes and in many different ways and most times the most unexpected sizes and ways inspires others to victories in faith as well.

God drew the line for Satan in the book of Job that Satan could not cross as it says in Job 1:12. As we know, Satan was defeated in Job, Job did not curse God, he complained a lot but never did he relent and curse God and God restored Job and all his family and wealth. God draws the line, when we stay within the bounds of the line that God draws for us in his Holy Word, we will not go wrong as Psalm 34:15 says, the eye of the Lord is on the righteous, and verse 17 says he will deliver us. We will never be sinless but if we have faith we will be delivered.

Jesus himself drew the line in the story of the woman caught in adultery as told in John 8, we don’t know what Jesus drew in the dirt on the ground but the line he drew was one the woman’s accusers could not cross in verse 7. They all realized they were not without sin and hand no right to accuse this woman of sin and so they could not throw a stone at her. Here is a line of judgment; we cannot judge others because we do not know the heart only God knows how much anyone loves him. Jesus also drew a line for the woman he had saved he told her to go and change her life of sin. A line or a goal that each of us tries to obtain every day of our lives. There are always temptations out there and we have Jesus’ words to be our guideline, our challenge is also, to go and leave our lives of sin.

Saul thought he had drawn the line, a line of persecution, in Acts 8:3 – But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison-but that line was about to change. On the way to Damascus when asked why Soul persecuted the Lord, Saul said in Acts 9:5 “Who are you, Lord?”Saul was out persecuting people who believed in Jesus and he didn’t even know of whom or why he was persecuting them. He didn’t know Jesus; so many times we set up lines of persecution, prejudices when we don’t even know or understand what we are against. The latest war on Terrorism is a good example of this kind of prejudice, we came out of 9/11 thinking everyone of Middle East decent or at least all Muslims were terrorist, which is as true as everyone who wears bib overalls is a farmer. The true Muslim faith is one of peace; the Muslim terrorists who train suicide bombers to commit such horrible crimes are not doing those of the true Muslim faith any favors.

God quickly changed Saul’s line of operation; he was blinded, then given his sight back and converted to Christianity. Paul as he then was called became the first missionary of the very new Christian church and started setting standards and lines for the churches, which he established throughout the region.

Lines are usually quite thin; like the centerline on the highway, there is not very much space separating you from that oncoming semi-truck. When we were kids, we waited for the bus by a highway and in our boredom we would walk the centerline to see how many footsteps long it was – a good thing our mother didn’t catch us! In baseball there is a very thin line between a good ball and a foul ball. A fine line between right and wrong. We set boundaries for ourselves and for those around us. Children need boundaries, rules, to know what is expected of them. We need to set boundaries for ourselves too, what to eat, what we watch or don’t watch on TV or at the movies. The Ten Commandments given to Moses are our guidelines to the boundaries that we set up.

There are two kinds of lines we talked about in the beginning that are not the kind of lines that a Christian should find themselves subject to. We should never be accused of setting of the sidelines. In spectator sports the sidelines keeps those out who are not participating in the sporting event. Christianity is not a spectator sport.

Then there are parallel lines, as you know parallel lines never meet, they run side-by-side, if we are running beside Jesus we are not letting him lead us in our lives. We keep ourselves at a distance that Jesus cannot come into our lives never intersect with Jesus loved and are running alone.

A question that came to mind was – How wide is the line between heaven and hell? The more I thought about this question the more unanswerable it became, because that is putting our width, a breadth to God's love to his grace, to his forgiveness. The question better stated is – What makes up the line between heaven and hell? What is the ingredient, the one thing that keeps us from an eternity in hell? That ingredient is given to us in Ephesians 2:8, 9. Grace has saved us, grace is unbounded love, grace is the source of our salvation and if we believe this we have faith, faith is a channel of our salvation, not the cause, grace is the cause. Our faith grows as we live, study and give of our time in ourselves to the Lord and the work of the Lord. The flexibility of that line is the forgiveness, because of our humanity, our sinful nature; we need that flexibility to repair our sinful ways. We cannot keep on sinning and just expect God to keep unforgiving us, if we willingly sin, then we cannot expect forgiveness.

The two kinds of lines that we did not talk about an opening statement, the end of the line and the bottom line. For Christians we believe there is no end of the line, just a shift in the line, the line changes. When we die in this life are soul goes to heaven and eternal line will continue, just a different place and time. Or if the rapture takes place before that point in time we will be taken into heaven once again, the line will only shift, continuing on throughout eternity.

The bottom line is getting right with God, accept God's gift of grace and forgiveness and never forget to pray. Prayer is one of the most wonderful lines that God has given us, it is a direct line to God; there are no answering machines or busy signals. With prayer, if we get out of line we can ask forgiveness for our sins and get back in line with God.

In case you are wondering where all this about lines started, in 2003 I was in charge of the cookie fellowship list at our church I forgot to draw the line for someone to sign up for goodies and I realized that no one was signing on the date with no line so I signed up for goodies that day.

Lines play a big part in our lives; we need to watch that we sent our lines, our boundaries not to keep Jesus out but to let him into our lives. Drawing lines so that we are encircled with God's love and grace, as we participate life, as a Christian, in church, in our family and in the community. We should light up the filament in our eternal light bulb; letting our light shine for Jesus wherever we go and whatever we do. Amen.