

# Editorial: How do we regard those outside our borders?

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“The border” is a freighted phrase in Texas, referring not just to a line on a map, but to a whole region and even a culture—La Frontera. It’s only natural the border would feature so prominently here, since we share 1,254 miles of border with Mexico—far more than New Mexico, Arizona and California combined.

The Rio Grande—itsself a natural demarcation line—runs the full length of the Texas-Mexico border. It seems inevitable, then, that governments would battle over who rules the river.

Christians should not be distracted by [the current argument](#) between two of those governments—Texas and the United States—about who has jurisdiction over the Rio Grande. That argument must not become a proxy war for the battle within ourselves about who has jurisdiction over our heart.

Is there a border in our heart? If we’re human, there is. How are we to relate to those outside that border? That’s a question we, not any government, need to answer.

## Going beyond borders

Clear and agreed-upon political borders mark what government is responsible for which territory. In the world as it is—in which no single government can take care of everyone and everything—we need clear and agreed-upon borders.

Such borders inevitably will be tested and contested. Thus, the weight of “the border” and the disagreement over who has the right to do what along the Rio Grande.

But my question isn’t about the border per se. My question is about how we relate to the border, or more specifically, how we relate to those outside our border.

At their most cynical, political borders are about guarding our land, our money and our way of life from those outside our border—from “them.” When someone crosses our border—legally or illegally—many of us often enough assume that person is after our land, our money and our way of life.

If this is how we understand borders, then it’s understandable we would have a strong and negative reaction to border crossing—particularly illegal crossing. Whether such a reaction can be justified, Christians need to think deeper than border politics. Border politics is the thing we elect others to deal with, so we can go on with our lives.

Jesus doesn’t let us off the hook so easily, however. He expects us to deal with the border inside us. He who equated anger with murder is more concerned about the condition of our hearts than whether Texas or the U.S. government rules the Rio Grande.

For this reason, Christians must not allow border politics to become a proxy war for the battle within ourselves over who will rule our heart.

It is the work of our governments—which we elect and fund—to establish jurisdiction over political borders. Our work is to examine our hearts. We can begin with the possessive pronoun “our.”

# What is ours?

For the Christian, “our” is a category error if we understand “our” to mean we own our time, our money, our stuff, even our life. For the Christian, nothing is ours in that sense. Rather, since we belong to Christ who bought us with his life, “our” refers to stewardship, not ownership.

What a Christian has—tangible and intangible—belongs, not to the Christian, but to Christ. How we steward what we have is to be in line with what Christ expects and calls us to do, no matter who an insurance company or tax agency views as the owner.

While Christians are expected to fulfill their legal obligations to their respective governments—“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”—we must not go all the way with those governments when their laws call us “owners.” We are stewards of what God—*the* owner—entrusts to us.

From that perspective, we no longer are talking about “our” land, “our” money and “our” way of life when we talk about borders—political or otherwise. Instead, we are talking about God’s creation for which we are responsible.

When someone from outside our border makes a claim on resources God has entrusted to us, our question is not, “How are we going to protect that resource?” Instead, we must ask, “What is God’s will for this resource”—the fine details of which admittedly can be hard to determine.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus’ answers to that question. Though he did not address political borders directly—nor the difficulty of honoring the law while obeying the Law—Jesus’ story hinged directly on the border between “us” and “them,” between “insiders” and “outsiders.”

In Jesus' story, the outsider breached the social border to care for an insider. Rather than walling himself off from one of "them," he freely used his resources to restore the other. Could we be so bold—or so humble—as to be the Samaritan and not the religious?

## **Borders and relationships**

Borders can be helpful, but they also can harden our distortions of others. They can cement our misunderstandings of what is ours to the point we believe we actually own what God has only entrusted to us.

Coming to grips with the bracing reality we own nothing is a fearsome thing for any of us. If nothing else, it confronts us with ceding control and being at God's mercy—God who often comes to us dressed as other people. It's no wonder we'd rather externalize this struggle and let Texas and the U.S. government sort it out.

This brings us back to the heart of the question. How do we regard those outside our borders—political or otherwise?

Are they invaders coming to take our stuff and change our way of life? Or are they people created in God's image who God expects us to love as God loves us? This is not a political question. This is a Christian question. We need to answer it.

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